

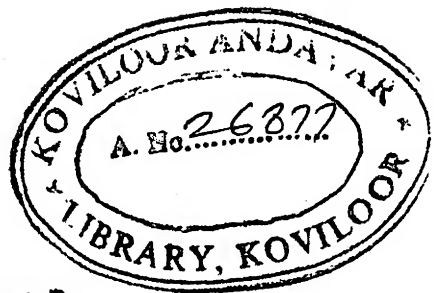
22/2

RG VEDIC STUDIES

(SERIES III)

TIME

M. SUNDAR RAJ



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22-2

RG VEDIC STUDIES.

(SERIES III).

TIME.

"Kalo'smi" (Bhagavad Gita. 11.32) (I am Time).

"Both Time and Space are essential for the existence of Matter" (Sullivan)

AT CLEVELAND

RIGHT

THEY ARE THE ONLY TWO THINGS THAT

ARE LEFT OF THE GREAT CITY OF CLEVELAND
AND THE GREAT CITY OF CLEVELAND

THEY ARE THE ONLY TWO THINGS THAT

10/1/1911

TO MY MOTHER

RECEIVED FROM

PREFACE

It is agreed by all authorities that the text of the Rg. Veda as we have it today is by the most conservative estimate, not less than 3,500 years old, and that it is a compilation of verses some at least of which must have been composed many centuries before that date. It is the most ancient extant living text, and it is the most sacred of the scriptures in Hinduism. In the last two or three centuries, it has attracted the respectful and profound admiration of many leading intellectuals of Western Europe.

But for all that, its contents remain still a deep mystery. For two centuries, it has received an exhaustive scrutiny at the hands of many great scholars in Europe; at home, the traditional commentary of Sāyana still holds sway. Many are the interpretations placed upon the verses, but a common agreement has not yet been reached in regard to either the language or the contents. The myths remains unresolved.

The author of the present work has come forward with a new and fresh commentary and exegesis. The merit of his work lies in the fact that he has not sought recourse to any material outside the text itself. Of still greater importance is the fact that he has covered the entire text with a view to presenting a comprehensive and coherent view of all the elements in the myths, taking into account the fact that they are to be read at various levels. New suggestions are also put forward to resolve some linguistic problems.

How far the author has succeeded in his efforts to produce an exhaustive and definitive exegesis is for the authorities and scholars in the subject to decide. But all readers of the work will, I am sure, find it a pleasant and instructive readable matter.

It is this which has attracted me to the work and I have, therefore, great pleasure in recommending it to all who are interested in the history of ancient cultures and growth of spiritual life in general, and of Hinduism is particular.

(Reproduced from the First Series).

I am hopeful that the manner of presentation and the contents of this book will evoke further interest in a subject which is of the greatest concern to all lovers of religion and culture, but which till now has had little popular appeal due to want of easily readable works of this type.

N. MAHALINGAM,
Chairman,
International Society
For The Investigation of Ancient
Civilizations

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RG VEDIC STUDIES

INTRODUCTION—GENERAL

In the words of Louis Renou, 'the Veda is precisely the sign, perhaps the only one, of Indian Orthodoxy'. ('The Destiny of the Veda in India', p. 2). That, of course, is the theoretical position in Hinduism. In practice, the sign of orthodoxy is the observance of caste injunctions, according to the general principles laid down in Manu's Dharma Sastra, and the very detailed codes of conduct built upon that text by social practices developed over centuries. However, it is to the Veda that Hindu theology turns for the legitimising authority for these practices, and Louis Renou is therefore, perfectly right.

Hindu orthodoxy is not confined to the upper classes only. It even extends to Harijans, the former Untouchables. The 'holier than thou' air which orthodoxy always breeds the world over is all-pervasive in Hinduism.

Louis Renou has only stated what has always been the core of disputation, and in many cases the only point of disagreement, not only between the brahmins, the mentors of orthodox Hinduism, on the one hand, and the Jains, the Buddhists and the Ājīvikas on the other, but also within Hindu fold itself, whenever and wherever the Bhakti and Śakti sects had made their appearance.

The Bhakti and Śakti sects always started as caste-levellers, and bhakti has been, till recently, the only attempt at reformation in Hindu Society. However, it aimed only at socio-religious reform. Ideas of a socio-economic reform have always been foreign to the Hindu mind and was never even contemplated in all the history of Hinduism prior to the last three decades. But a successful socio-religious reform can well turn out to be a precursor to socio-economic changes. The obstacles that Bhakti encountered, therefore, stemmed not only from the obvious differences in religious concepts but also from the deep underlying threat to economic interests, the real potent factor. All Bhakti movements

(Reproduced from the First Series).

ultimately ended up by becoming merely the same old Hinduism with all the paraphernalia of caste. The only change effected was the appeal to the Veda as legitimising authority. But this became minimal in some of the more staunch sects, whilst amongst the less zealous ones the authority of the Vedas was fully restored with the result that most bhakti sects—not all, such as the Lingayats—became a part and parcel of orthodox Hinduism. Many of the non-bhakti movements such as the Sāṅkhya, which started with opposition to the fundamental concepts of Vedism, also finally ended up with a similar fate of absorption into the orthodox schools.

How was Hinduism able to so successfully ward off all challenges, not only to its socio-religious and economic institutions, but even to its conservative and orthodox religious concepts? This is the most fascinating question that faces intellectuals who approach the history of Hindu religion in an analytical spirit. (Such a critical study, however, does not call for a total renunciation of its spiritual message when seen at the best, an unimaginable paradox that cannot hold true with respect to any other religion). Until recent times, Hinduism had very rarely to resort to violence to root out rebels within its fold. It merely talked them out.

The magic word 'Veda' has been the most powerful, if not the only, weapon in the armoury of orthodox Hinduism. Though Renou's analysis is substantially correct, his general remark, namely: 'Even in the most orthodox domains, the reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple 'raising of the hat' in passing, to an idol by which one no longer intends to be encumbered later on' (p. 2, op-cit.) may, however, create a wrong impression. The fact is, the Defenders of the Faith do not just treat the Veda as 'an idol, to which the hat is to be raised in passing', but as a weapon of warfare, in intellectual struggle, and also even more powerfully and successfully in psychological brain-washing. (Hindus realised centuries before any others, the superiority of psychological to physical or even intellectual methods in warfare).

Whoever compiled—that is redacted—the Veda, some 3500 or 4000 years ago, left it in a very convenient form for his successors. The compulsions leading to this result were no doubt historical and social, but he—or perhaps they—saw to it that in the final compilation, each of the four vedas, namely, the Rg, the Yajur,

the Sāma and the Atharva, were put in four sections, called the Samhita, the Brāhmana, the Āranyaka, and the Upaniṣads. This was eminently a wise thing to do, though it created a logical paradox in that the four sections have basically nothing in common with one another. (If there is anything common between them at all, it may be traced to those elements which completely dominate the Upaniṣads). Some of these elements do make their appearance in the speculative portions which constitute comparatively a minor, but distinctly separate, sections of the mantrā. But the dominating elements in the Samhita, in spite of this, remain mythological. (It must, however, be remembered that the Upaniṣads themselves are highly eclectic). However, the redactors were not concerned with logic, but with the differing practical requirements of the historians, mythologists, ritualists, legalists and the philosophers amongst them. By keeping the sections dealing with their respective subjects properly arranged, everyone was satisfied, and each could utilise that portion of it which he found useful to himself without coming into clash with others. The Vedas have thus come to be all things to all men.

The philosophers revelled in the Upaniṣads, and the ritualists and law-givers found sufficient and satisfying material in the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda and the Brāhmanas. The shaman had his Atharva Veda, but no one at first knew what to do with the Rg. Veda. Half-hearted attempts were made to use bits and pieces of it in the sacrificial rites, and the Sāma Veda borrowed from it practically entirely, all in a rather mechanical way. But even this limited use of the Rg. Veda ceased when the Vedic sacrificial religion was replaced by the Āgamic, leaving the former to the small band of hard-core Mimāṃsīc brahmins to occasionally practise it in their rituals. For the rest of the time they learnt the relevant texts by rote, and then conducted endless disputations about them in a manner entirely satisfactory to themselves.

Long before the advent of Buddha, the brahminical conscience had shown signs of being troubled by the anomalous state of the Rg Veda, by its inconsistencies, and by the unintelligibility of not only the myths, but even of common words and passages. This we know from Yāska. But with Buddha, the bull really entered the China shop. First to beat the retreat was the sacrificial religion,

which found sympathisers only among the mimāṃsics, convert as well as overt. The Upaniṣadic philosophers, on the other hand, had so much in common with Buddha and his followers of both Mahāyāna and Hināyana sects (the eclectic nature of the Upaniṣads making it possible to accommodate all types of metaphysical thinking) that it appeared at first as if the two philosophical schools of Buddhism and Hinduism would merge. This development posed the threat of ultimate loss of identity of the latter, the most severely affected victim of which would have been caste concepts and institutions. This would naturally have later on led to the socio-economic institutions also being affected, and social power passing from the hands of the brahminical elite.

Buddha never expressed himself strongly against caste or the Veda, but his teachings in the hands of his followers made explicit what was only implicit in his message. Caste and the Veda were in danger from the Buddhists, who produced in due course intellectual giants, such as Buddha Ghōṣa, and Nāgārjuna, many of them being converts from the brahminical community, which was becoming slowly eroded.

The danger could not be averted by physical violence. Though violence was resorted to not infrequently by the leaders of orthodoxy, it became evident that the breakdown of a peaceful atmosphere and the disturbance of peace would only redound to their disadvantage.

Necessarily, therefore, recourse was taken to polemics in philosophy, which for the orthodox community meant teachings of the Upaniṣads. First, however, Hinduism itself had to close its ranks, and forge a common base for its various schools, such as the Nyāya, the Sāṃkhya and so on which differed so vastly amongst themselves.

The first step in realigning the defending forces was the compilation of the Brahma Sūtras which was a gloss upon the Upaniṣads. Bringing together in one text the various concepts gave an appearance of unity to Hindu philosophical thought. Then, some genius composed the Bhagavat Gita. Unlike the Brahma Sūtras whose terse and cryptic style made it difficult reading, the Gita is a piece of beautiful poetry. Moreover, it went further, than the Brahma Sūtras in syncretising the various 'darśanas' or schools

such as the Sāṃkhya, the Vedānta and so on. The poetic style, and the lack of disputation in its tone has given it a universal appeal, satisfying to all but the most severe and exacting critic.

Even with all this, the coping stone was missing. The main question still remained unanswered. Why should anyone accept the Hindu schools in preference to the Buddhists who preached the same basic philosophical concepts and carried them further to their logical conclusion? If anything, Buddhist humanitarian moral concepts had an edge over Hinduism, and, therefore, a greater appeal to sensitive intellectuals. The Krishna of the Bhagavat Gita stood alone against Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and the doctrine of the love and peace preached by the latter rang a morally higher sensitive tone than the Gita's call to war even against one's relatives and friends for the sake of 'Kshatriya Dharma', which, in those days, laid emphasis not so much on the protection of the weak and the downtrodden but on the acquisition of power and the expansion of territory. As for 'action for its own sake without regard for the results', both schools taught it, but with this difference that the Buddhist infused it with the doctrine of love, in comparison with which the Hindu concept seems so lacking in humane feelings.

The great threat which Buddhism posed to Hinduism before the coming of Sankara cannot be realized even to a fractional extent today, as the former has practically disappeared from the face of the country. Even before the coming of Sankara, the seeds of decay were apparent in the monasteries of Buddhism, and the final blow to that religion in India was delivered by the Muslims long after Sankara. Nevertheless, it was Sankara who rejuvenated Hinduism at a time when it appeared as if it was lost altogether, and it was he who gave it that impetus and direction which has enabled it to withstand all threats to its life, whether from Islam or Christianity. It now appears that it may be able to withstand even the powerful scientific rational thought of the West, in spite of the gigantic support provided to the latter by the modern Industrial state and economy. Sankara skilfully combined two elements in his strategy. He roped in the high authority commanded by the term, 'Veda', and tied it with Bhakti and Sakti. Subsequent gurus and ācharyas of Hinduism after him have followed him in

this respect even when they did not agree with him fully in his concept of the Vedanta. Many bhakti sects have tried to throw off the shackles of the Veda, but never successfully. Even the most extreme of these groups, with rare exceptions, have found it necessary to retain the term.

The ambiguity which cloaks the term 'Veda' has considerably helped in these efforts. Far from being a handicap, the obscurity in which the Veda is cloaked has been its most powerful weapon. It has endowed it with an air of great sanctity, and deep and profound mysteries. Not knowing what it really contained, its opponents could only beat in the air, and for its proponents, it was magic. Thus it had great psychological value of which Sankara and, after him, all Hindu propagandists took full advantage. It was sheer genius which married bhakti and Sakti to Veda. It conferred legitimacy in Hinduism for the passionate emotionalism of bhakti, and at the same time, placed orthodoxy, with its Veda, at the control of affairs and made it invulnerable to logic, since it was not formulated in rational terms and the concepts were unknown.

What is the 'Veda'?

There are three different senses in which the word 'Veda' is used in Hinduism. The first treats the whole corpus, the four-Samhitas (Rg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva) along with all the accompanying Brāhmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads, as the Veda. To this school every bit of these texts is a part of the 'Veda', and no one part is more important than the other. This naturally creates difficulties of logic in their exposition but then faith is more powerful than logic. The second view has only the Upanisads in mind, and the third only the Samhitas, taken with or without the Upanisads. Hindus, contrary to their general habit in their philosophical debates, scrupulously avoid any precise definition of the term 'Veda'. It is only from the context that one can find out which section is referred to, and the curious picture is often to be seen of the same speaker (or writer) who has appealed at one stage to the 'Veda' (in general) as his authority, later on stating that some part or other of the text was not acceptable to him.

Amongst all these texts, the one which has always commanded the greatest respect and reverence amongst the Hindus is the Rg

Veda. In the last resort, when any dispute, or difference of opinion arises as to what is the authority for any religious question, and when all other arguments have failed, a simple appeal to 'Veda' suffices to demolish the opponent. If the dispute is over the interpretation of any point in the Upaniṣads the same answer should silence all further discussions, but in this case, the term 'Veda' has to be understood to refer to the Rg Samhita, and no explicit statement to this effect is considered necessary. No chapter and verse from that text is expected to be quoted by the disputant, claiming that authority, and if at all a verse is quoted, such as for example, when the Puruṣa Sukta is cited to justify the caste order, it would be a sacrilege to critically analyse it or to question its validity. There the matter ends. The Rg Veda is the court of last resort.

Justice is portrayed sometimes as blind, and as a court of last resort, blindness pervades the Hindu view of the Rg Veda. Yāska's 'Nirukta', a work of the 6th or 7th Cent. B.C., reveals how completely obscure the Rg Veda was to the brāhmin intellectual of those times. The problems encountered in interpreting the Rg Veda are very vast. Apart from the problem of language, the innumerable myths and 'aitihāsic' (legendary) references are completely mysterious. There has been till the beginning of the 19th Century (actually till about 170 years ago) only one major work of commentary on the Rg Veda. It came from the pen of Sāyana. (Mahidhara is comparatively less important). It is a Mimāṃsī work, and for a scholar of that school there is no problem of interpretation, for the meaning of every word lies in itself. Extending that concept, every myth and 'aitihāsic' story is the truth as it stands. With some adjustments here and there, Sāyana wants us to take the Rg Veda as it stands, without any critical scrutiny. He simply presented in classical Sanskrit what appears in Vedic Sanskrit, and wherever even this was not possible, he simply glossed it over. He added also for good measure stories of his own in his commentary. But what we want is not just a translation, in whatever language and however linguistically correct it may be, but a reasonable and intelligible interpretation, and that we do not have even now.

That was the scene as it stood till Western scholars of great distinction and ability took over Rg Vedic studies. We need not

go into their motivations. Suffice it to say that they have expended a considerable amount of time and energy in this task. The drive has come mostly from German academicians whether in their own country, like Roth, Geldner, and so on, or emigrants to Britain (Max Müller, for example) or the United States (Lanmann, for example); others in Britain, Macdonell and Keith, for example, or in France, Bergaigne, Langlois, etc., also have done very great work. The tradition has been continued by Louis Renou, Gonda and others.

What have the Western scholars contributed to our understanding of the Rg Veda? Firstly, they have systematised the philology, treating Vedic Sanskrit as an unpolluted Indo-Germanic language. (In the last thirty or forty years, there has been a steady change in this attitude, with scholars like Gonda and Meyrhöfer producing more and more evidence to show the possibility of Dravidian (and Munda) influences in the formation of the Sanskrit language at its source. The new philology has in no way given us a meaningful reading of the text. All that we have are translations which struggle with the words, and lengthy dissertations on individual vocables. As for the mythology, the early attempts to solve the problems by comparative studies with other European cultures has now been abandoned, and each scholar produces his own interpretation of the myths. (Many Western scholars, themselves, such as Louis Renou, have realized these short-comings).

We are no better off to-day in understanding the Rg Veda than before. With Sayana, we had at least something readable even if it be irrational, illogical and totally surrounded in mystery. Now, we do not have even that from the modern studies, with the added problem that the ground under us is continually shifting. Max Müller once prophesied that the Rg Veda would keep scholars engaged for many years. As things look at present, the exercise will end without achieving the hoped-for result through sheer exhaustion of the scholars. This may be alright for the West, but can we afford to accept this situation?

For the West, the Rg Veda is nothing more than an intellectual puzzle, whose solution, if at all ever reached, would, at the best, provide a link in the history of Hindu religion. We, Hindus cannot look at Rg Vedic studies in this way, as just an intellectual

exercise. It is part and parcel of our culture and our religion. The Rg Veda has had in the past a powerful impact on our make-up, and even recently a very important movement, namely the Ārya Samāj, based itself on the Rg Veda as a scripture. This movement has far-reaching implications even in the political and social areas. Moreover, one of our most revered figures of recent times whose influence on current elitist society is very profound has drawn great inspiration from it. However spiritually uplifting, or chauvinistically useful, may be their views on the Rg Veda and its interpretation, they do not entirely satisfy the critical, rational, modern mind. And for a long time to come, Hindus cannot forget in their heart of hearts that the whole edifice of Hinduism, as a culture and religion, is built upon it. When a Hindu talks of his tradition, he knows that the foundations lie in the Veda, though he cannot say what it is and how it came to be a part of himself.

Can we afford to remain ignorant of our own history and the course of our religious development for long? We are in an age of intellectualism, an age of critical analysis, which demands that its intellectual curiosity be satisfied as far as possible before it allows faith to take over. If we, at least some of us, do not study the Vedas, and tell others how they are relevant to our present situation, how can we claim any value for them? The day will come when Hindus must secure their cultural foundations, or submit themselves to the secular gods of science which are hammering at their doors. We, Hindus, have to-day a kaleidoscopic view of our religion. The bits and pieces are floating about from which each man may choose what he likes. There is no central pillar which holds them altogether.

It is out of a painful awareness of this problem that I have come to the study of the Rg Veda, that mysterious central force which has somehow spawned a multitude of units, it itself having found its origin from the coming together of a variety of elements. After many years of study, I believe I have a very satisfactory solution to the problem of Rg Vedic interpretation and I present them in the form of a number of studies which I call 'Rg Vedic Studies'. The present volume carries five such studies. I hope to follow this up with others in batches of about this number each.

I may say at the outset that, as I now see it, the Rg Veda reveals its authors as men of very great intellectual calibre. The poetical elements, namely imagery, symbolism etc., are thoroughly fascinating and entrancing. There is spiritualism of the highest order not only in those pieces which, as in the tenth Mandala, openly give expression to it, but even in those obscure and, as Max Müller put it, 'tedious' verses where it is concealed and not too apparent. Above all, there is about the whole work a remarkable spirit of eclecticism. Many are the sources from which the ideas have flown in, Dravidian, Aryan and Munda. The language itself can put forward no claim to purity, such as pure Indo-European or pure Dravidian. It is a thoroughly good mixture. The mythology follows a consistent symbolism to express ideas which are current even now among the Hindus, and which will always be (with some exceptions), so long as man is what he is, deemed to be very high in form and concept. The Rg Vedic ṛṣis were in search of an answer to a question which every thinking man has to face sometime or other. What is this universe, how did it come into being, and what makes it tick? They have provided us with a solution which will remain unsurpassed in its excellence and its truth for all time to come. They not only speculated, but also looked into their inner self through yoga. No better method has been discovered even by modern science in all its powerful glory, and there is no doubt that even the future cannot improve upon it. At least, it will remain so, so long as man remains the puny thing that he is. The Rg Vedic solution has, however, for various reasons been cloaked in a mythology which has made it completely mysterious till now.

Beyond this, I will not say anything more about what the Rg Veda is as I see it. I am trying to arrange my studies in a sequence which will gradually lead the reader to the final denouement.

Scholarly readings of the Rg Veda present a picture of disjointed concepts with no central feature binding them together. In this they are one with Sāyana. That is not surprising since it is his commentary which they generally follow, modified only by the modern technique of Indo-European comparative philology. This is a very serious short-coming in these works.

The Rg Veda presents the weltanschauung of the civilization in which the ṛṣis lived. It is difficult to believe that they did not

possess a comprehensive world-view, and that their ideas were so disconnected as the scholars would have us believe. Quite obviously, the failing is not in the Rg Veda, but in the interpretations which are placed before us.

To me, it appears that there is a central concept running throughout the Rg Veda, which reveals itself once we are able to penetrate the mysteries of the myths. Any weltanschauung is a complete circle and the difficulty in an analytical description lies in deciding where to start. Unless the complete picture is known, it is difficult to realise how the parts fit into the whole. On the other hand, the validity of any discussion about the whole depends upon the acceptance of the description of the various parts. This dilemma I have tried to meet and in the choice of my methodology it has played a vital part.

In my understanding of the centre round which the Rg Veda world-view turns, the concept of Agni plays a very significant role. The Agni which the Rg Veda mentions by name is of course in some places the physical fire, but more often than not it is only a symbolic expression for some more powerful force. On the other hand, even this power does not represent the central concept, which lies even further beyond.

That being so, once all the parts of the Rg Vedic Agni are put together, it will serve as a light to lead us further.

I have followed this principle in arranging my articles. My presentation will bring together the various myths grouped together in such a way that each group focuses attention on one aspect of Agni's traits. Since there are many such aspects, there will be many such groups. (Lest there be any misunderstanding arising out of my references to Agni, I would like to make it very clear that, with all due respect and reverence, I find myself unable to agree with either Swami Dayanand or Sri Aurobindo on this subject).

Once the various group studies are completed, it will be just one step more to reach the core thought. And once that is reached, there should be no difficulty in tackling the many peripheral problems, such as the Ārya-Dāsa question.

I do not claim to be able to produce a solution to all the Rg Vedic problems, but I certainly think that most of the major internal

aspects can be rationally explained. I shall also, at the appropriate time, take up many of the external questions such as the probable relationship between the Rg Veda and the Indus Valley Civilization.

At this stage, I have one important point to make. Rg Vedic myths are the foundation for all later myths of orthodox, brahminical Hinduism. And they are all 'manufactured myths', that is, unlike the myths of primeval societies, they were formulated to explain not just natural phenomena, but to express in mythical terms deep concepts, whether metaphysical, social, moral or physical. They are prior to the religions, called the yajñas, which borrowed from them indiscriminately and applied them improperly with ulterior motives.

A few words now about my methodology. I have tried to follow, as far as possible, the methodology of the Western scholars, but wherever this has not worked, I have adopted an independent line, the justification for which I have made out at the appropriate places. The Rg Veda to-day is in the hands of scholars, the general public even amongst the Hindu elites taking no interest in it. I have, therefore, necessarily to present my arguments in a way which will be acceptable to the experts even if my views do not find favour with them. I have, therefore, made extensive quotations from the original text and wherever I have resorted to Dravidian philology, I have given the Tamil rendering (along with the Roman script as standardised in the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary—(DED)—of Emeneau and Burrow). The general reader may find this somewhat tedious. On the other hand, I have tried to adopt a style of writing which is as simple as possible and which, I hope, will counter-balance this shortcoming. Perhaps, one day when this series is finished, I shall be able to bring out a popular version of my findings.

Rg Vedic studies today are so much in the hands of academicians that every work carries an imposing array of quotations from the works of other scholars, together with a formidable bibliographical list. I have avoided this, as far as possible, not because I owe nothing to anybody else, but precisely because I owe too much. Moreover, if I quote one scholar, I will have to acknowledge many others who have crossed swords with him. My debt to others lies in the inspiration I have drawn from them, not the conclusions reached by me.

The translation in English which I have utilised generally is Griffith's. Where, however, I have found it necessary, I have resorted to Wilson also, and while doing so, I have acknowledged my debt to him. These are the only scholars who have provided full translations of the texts in English. With neither of them can I say I am in agreement. The problem is not in the verbal aspects of the translation, except where the unique nature of Sanskrit syntax makes more than one reading equally correct. The problem lies in the mythology and that has not been solved in the English, German or French translations or commentaries. That is why I have not thought it necessary to quote from the translations in German or French. That would only have made matters more complex, since it would have been necessary to further translate them into English since my work is addressed primarily to people conversant with the English language, which I know is the case with all scholars of Indology. As regards the Suktā quotations, they are from the Pada-Pāṭa.

I have in conclusion to express my profound sense of gratitude to Shri N. Mahalingam, but for whose generous help I would not have been able to carry out these researches and see them brought out in print. A deeply spiritual person himself, he has done much for religious and scholarly causes. At the same time, he has taken great interest in all aspects of Hindu culture and history. Such qualities are rare enough in any individual these days, but that they should be combined with the successful management of large modern industries is something which should command the respect of every one of us.

I owe much to many others amongst whom I would like to mention by name Shri C. S. Mahadevan, who has encouraged me throughout and has taken immense pains in seeing this work through the printing. I do not know what I would have done, if I had not had his help, as well as that of many others who have cheerfully borne the task of typing, and frequently re-typing, the manuscripts.

I need hardly say that the views expressed in this work and the interpretations presented herein are entirely my responsibility, as also the shortcomings that may be found therein.

RG VEDIC STUDIES

SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO THE III SERIES

(STUDIES III.1 TO III.5)

M. SUNDAR RAJ

In the previous series, two steps in the act of Creation, or rather in the emergence of the Universe and the World, namely Light and Space, were discussed. In this Series the story is continued to show how Order and Laws (dharma, rta and vrata) which are necessary to ensure the regularity of functioning of the various operations in the world were established by Agni and other devas. This includes Time, the greatest regulator and controller of them all.

In the first paper of this Series, Tvaṣṭṛ is found to be Father-Time. When Aditi and Tvaṣṭṛ emerged from Jyoti, the Eternal Unborn, the First Principle of all things, Tvaṣṭṛ the completely male principle (Aditi the First, and Second remaining as androgynes) found himself loaded with two major responsibilities. The first was creation of life on earth, and the second, the custody of Time as Infinity (Immortal Time). How these functions were discharged by Tvaṣṭṛ, and what part Agni (who, in one sense, is himself Tvaṣṭṛ) played in this matter forms the subject of these series. The rhythm of nature and life arises from the flux and flow of time, which requires the break-up of Infinite Time into the ordinary time of sensual perception in its three phases of Past, Present and Future. For this purpose, the devas sent Agni to the Rbhus, who were themselves not devas at that stage. Being mortals, they had experience of Time in this aspect, which was unknown to the devas. The existence of these mortals, before life itself had come into being, and man was yet to appear on earth, may be questioned on the basis of logic and reason. But this is mythology which is free from the constraints of ordinary reason, and mythology has its own wonderful logic. What can

be more logical than that the devas should entrust the task of creating the flux of time to mortals who were sensitive to time of this nature when they, the devas themselves, had no knowledge or experience of it? (Rg Vedic mythology thinking of this nature requires to be admired for its subtlety and brilliance, rather than denigrated for not conforming to modern man's reasoning in such matters).

The contents of Study III.3 (anticipating Study II.2) refers to the Rbhus. The Rbhus created time in flux by first of all constructing two bay horses for Indra (their leader as Rbhukṣan), and a wonderfully unique chariot in which Time can roll on under the guidance of Aśvins, two new devas who appear always as a pair. The charioteer was Agni, the father of Aśvins, and in fact of everybody, being himself only a form, and a superior form, of his father, Tvaṣṭṛ himself. Having done this, Rbhus broke up, with the help of an axe manufactured for this very purpose by Brhaspati, the one single cup of Tvaṣṭṛ which symbolically represents Infinite Time. The Rbhus ultimately fashioned four cups out of this single one. The four represented, (1) the Infinite Time left with Tvaṣṭṛ, (2) the Past left with Varuna, (3) the Present controlled by Indra, and (4) the Future which lay in the lap of the other gods. The Rbhus also settled the problem of reconciling the difference in periodicity of the sun and the moon, which is about 12 days in the year by suggesting the adoption of the device of intercalation. It was the Rbhus who created the year, the months, and the days, 30 days making a month, and 12 months making a year.

This act of Rbhus resulted in Tvaṣṭṛ retiring from his role as controller of Time, and devoting himself wholeheartedly to his other function, namely procreation, of which art he is the master. The Rbhus were granted the reward of immortality for their services by the devas. Before going away to heaven, the Rbhus handed over charge—a thoroughly bureaucratic system this is!—to Aśvins for working out the details of the operation of time in the Universe.

This is the subject matter of Studies III.1 and III.3, which are closely connected with one another.

Study III.2 deals with the creation by Agni of 'dharma', 'ṛta' and 'vrata' to operate as Principles controlling order and rhythm in life. Dharma had the overall control over the other two principles, and was concerned with the functioning of the Universe as a whole, while Ṛta affected the individual operations, such as the movements of the sun, the moon and the stars, the day and the night, the months and the year and so on. These were grouped together in several sub-units on a rational and systematic basis and left in charge of various devas, Indra, the Ādityas, Rudra and son on, each having his own area of authority assigned to him with sufficient power to discharge his functions. Indra, for example, had to protect light and life from the dark forces of tamas, for which purpose he had his vajra, fashioned by Brhaspati out of the so and carrying the power, śakti, of Agni. Varuna controlled the night and was also responsible to oversee human actions. He had his spies and the noose and so on.

The 'vratas' established ties between devas and even more so between devas and men. Each deva had his own 'vrata', by observing which men established a bond between themselves and the particular deva chosen by them. Faithful observance of these 'vratas' ensured whatever gifts the men wanted, which were within the powers of that particular deva. The observances consisted of partaking only prescribed diet and performing certain simple rituals. There are distinct passages which point to the existence of the 'vrata' form of worship which is distinctly different from the sacrificial (yajña) form of religion.

These are the contents of Study III.2 (Study III. 3 has been discussed in the earlier paragraphs.).

Study III.4 deals with the activities of the Aśvins, whose primary task was working out the details of calculation and operation of time. The car which they were given for this purpose was formed in consonance with the three phases of time, Past, Present and Future. It had, therefore, all its accoutrements and characteristics in triples. (The R.V. people did not look upon the Present Time in the same way as we do. It was not for them a point of the immediate now, but a more lengthened period including the immediate past, being different, however, from the real past which lies even further back.)

Why did the R.V. people attach so much importance to the number Two also in the Ásvin myths? That is because they looked upon time as closely related to light. In their view, it is the alternation between time and light, which is one of the basic causes for the origin of time. Day and night, the dark and bright halves of the moon, the sun's brightness while in the northern sphere becoming dimmed when it enters the south, etc., were for them factors to be taken into account in explaining light. They were children of nature for whom the sun and moon were the clock. We are children of electricity for whom time was manufactured in Switzerland. Who is right?

The Ásvins developed for man the gnomon with the aid of which he could determine the beginning and end of a day, calculated from the duration which elapses between two consecutive events when the sun touches the meridian. (For ritual purposes, however, the day for the RV people began with the sun's appearance at dawn.).

The Ásvins divided the day into sub-units, first of 12, then 5 of each of these 12 units, and so on. They worked out the ultimate unit of time (to which I think the RV people gave the name 'nimisha'). There were 72 'nimishas' in the next higher unit (to which I have given the name Kāla). This figure is a multiple of three and two, the former being doubled and the latter tripled ($72 = 3^2 \times 2^3$). This is a combination of great appeal to the RV people, for whom certain numbers such as all the first ten, namely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 12, 30, 60, 720, and so on, had an aesthetic appeal. Two of the sub-units higher than the Kāla are Muhūrtha and Yojana. There appears to have existed a difference of opinion amongst the RV people (reflected in the same myth), one school holding that Time is a great devourer or 'vrka', and preferring to divide the time of the day in sub-divisions of 100 and 1000. It may be noted in passing that according to this mode of calculation, dividing a day of $24 \times 60 \times 60$ seconds by 100 would give a unit of 864, a figure which forms the base in many myths of aeons and yugas in Hindu and Jain calendars.

The RV people had a clepsydra, as can be deduced from some of the passages, and arrangements seem to have existed for publicly calling out the time in the night.

The RV describes the Aśvins as Wonder-workers (dasrāh), and a number of tales are told of the miracles performed by them in the service of man. I have chosen three such tales, namely of Chyavana, Bhujyu and Rjraśva for discussion in this Study, and have shown that these myths are symbolic expressions of time's operations. The divine physicians, the Aśvins restored youth to Chyavana, because they had the power, as masters of time as it were, to put the clock back. Bhujyu who was caught in the midst of floods, was carried over the sea in mid-air (antarikṣa) by them in ships for three days and three nights after which he emerged on to the sea-shore. Etymologically, Bhujyu means the 'bent or curved' one, and the myth merely describes the emergence of the moon (as the 'horned' or bent moon) on the third day after New Moon, an event of great importance both to Hinduism and Islam. (Other miracles and aspects, such as the fondness for honey in the Aśvin myths will be discussed in later Studies.).

Study III.5 merely provides a resume of the first four studies, as seen from the point of view of Agni as the Central Power in all these matters.

RG VEDIC STUDIES III

TVASTR, FATHER TIME

STUDY III.1

Man's awareness of Time is purely experiential ; he cannot formulate concepts about it. The discussions about Space—Time of modern physics falls into the same category. It does not explain what these things mean. It only says how they work in man's experience of life. The difference is that it employs highly technical mathematical language much beyond the understanding of most persons including scientists themselves.

However, the inability to conceptualise the nature of space, time and life has never stood in the way of men talking about them. In fact, the need to do so is forced upon men for practical purposes. It is a cultural requirement of every civilisation that it should formulate some views in a pragmatic way on these matters which function as the base for all conceptual thought. Whether such expositions of a purely practical nature are right or wrong is not very relevant, since in any case, no one is able to provide a completely incontrovertible philosophy dealing with these subjects. What is more important is whether the concerned civilisation is able to build upon them a culture, intellectually and aesthetically appealing.

To that extent, the Rg Vedic approach to the problem of Time is eminently satisfactory, just as we have already found it to be the case in the matter of Space. My purpose in this Study is to show what views were held by the Rg Veda on Time, its origin, its operations and methods of functioning, and its impact on life process. As in everything else, the Rg Vedic people adopted the language of mythology to express their views on these various aspects of time. In the process, they have created a complex set of myths, the penetration of which by scholars who came after them has become a difficult, almost an impossible task. Consequently, it is only by re-evaluating these myths that we can understand their thoughts.

The subject of time always brings up the question of timelessness, or Eternity, just as space, matter, mind and life all raise question of what exists when these are absent. There is no satisfactory explanation—rationally speaking—in all these cases, but the case of time is even more complicated, in that man's experience of these others is direct, whereas time is experienced indirectly. Men generally identify time with light, and for them the complete absence of light would mean the end of everything, since time enters into everything.

Religions solve this problem by postulating a world in which another type of light exists. Without going too deeply into the matter, we may adopt the term Immortality, which operates in a world called Paradise in which Time has come to a stop. In all other respects paradise is just like this world with all the operations magnified conceptually to gigantic proportions. (Events in a timeless world is of course a paradox.)

Later Hinduism in its non-philosophical expositions has fallen more or less into this concept of Paradise and Immortality. This is an escape from the conundrum which is encountered when the question of Absolute Time,—and Absolute Light—comes up. It does not explain how this light of Immortality—the lightless light as it were—is linked with the ordinary light of the world and the relative time in which it is manifested.

The Rg Veda has a unique approach to this problem. It accepts boldly that time is of two kinds, Absolute and Relative, each of which has its own correlative in Light, Absolute and Relative. Even more boldly it proceeds to discuss the inter-relationship between all these concepts, but only in mythic terms. However, in all fairness to the Rg Vedic people it must be said that in some remarkable passages, it has accepted that these are merely speculations, and that Truth, the final Truth, is, and will remain, Unknowable.

The centre-piece of Rg Vedic discussions on Time lies in the figure of Tvāstr, who has two important functions. He is both Father of Time and Father of Life. The two functions cannot be entirely separated. Who creates time creates life. But purely with a view to present a clear picture of Time and its evolution,

I shall, in this paper, concentrate attention on only that aspect of Tvaṣṭr's functions, merely touching upon his biological function wherever essential. The full tale of Tvaṣṭr as Father of Life, and son of Death also, will be told elsewhere.

I have already shown in my earlier papers how Tvaṣṭr is just another name for Dakṣa. This difference seems to have been made by the Rg Veda to place emphasis on these two different functions, which is made clear by etymological analysis also. Tvaṣṭr's POWER creates Time and Life, and as Dakṣa, it co-operates with other Powers to cast on the world, (Earth and antarikṣa) light and darkness; (without darkness there can be no light.), through Agni, the Sun, the Moon; the Nakṣatras, the Ādityas and so on.

■ Tvaṣṭr (or Dakṣa II) is a part of the Primeval Light (Jyoti) and at the same time a part of the Primeval Darkness, Tamas. He and Aditi are conjoined in a sort of androgynous relationship. Jyoti is the Light above all lights, and the Life of all lives. All this has already been gone into in my earlier Studies. I am giving a brief resume of those discussions here merely as an introduction to the next step in the creation of the Universe, and also to re-emphasize the fact that the concept of Jyoti is the answer (amongst others) to the problem of Absolute Light.

The Rg Veda holds that Absolute Time merges into Absolute Light which is Jyoti.

This is a very unique, and wonderfully imaginative solution to the problem, even if it be purely mythological and speculative. (Actually many Hindu saints aver that Jyoti is not just a concept, but a phenomenon experienced by themselves. But that is another matter).

The androgyne Aditi—Tvaṣṭr is the (mythically) personified form of Jyoti, and Vṛtra of Tamas. Aditi is pure life and light (earthly form), whereas Tvaṣṭr possesses a slight mixture of darkness and impurity (speaking in Absolute terms) in him. (Pure darkness in the world of time is Vṛtra, the personified form of the Absolute tamas). Aditi-I is concerned with LIGHT, Order and Arrangement whereas Tvaṣṭr (as Dakṣa-I) has his powers limited to creation (and Time) only. The Aditi-Tvaṣṭr complex as Jyoti

is the repository of all life, order, time, earth, heaven and everything else when the Universe has retreated back into its shell.

Tvaṣṭr is the repository of life and time (in the withdrawn state of the Universe). Creation begins when this deva releases them to become manifest in the world, as is mentioned in several Rg-Vedic myths. I shall confine myself here to those myths which concern his role in creation of time. In all these passages he is associated with the Rbhus, the devas who had once been men.

Before I proceed further, let me give at the outset, a succinct account of Time as seen by the Rg Vedic people, as will finally emerge from the detailed study.

In the Rg Veda, Time is classified principally in two groups. First is Absolute Time, which is merged in Jyoti. Second is Relative Time or time as operative in the manifested world personified as Tvaṣṭr. This again is divided into three sections, namely, Past Present and Future, personified as a group termed Rbhus or Rbhava or Vibhaya or Vāja. Each element of this group has its own individual designation, namely Vibhavan, Rbhukṣan (or Rbhu) and Vāja.

The R.V. symbol for time is a cup, and it is said to be the cup fashioned by Tvaṣṭr because he is the Lord of Time. There are nearly 70 passages in the Rg Veda where Tvaṣṭr makes his appearance. Of these, about 18 deal with his role in the creation of time.

Verses 10.53.9, and 10 deal with the cup of Immortality.

‘त्वष्टा मायाः वेत् अपसां अपःस्तमः बिभ्रत् पात्रा देवस्यानानि शंसता
शिशीते नूनं परशुं सुऽआयसं येन वृश्चात् एतस्य ब्रह्मणः पतिः ॥’

(10.53.9)

‘सतः नूनं कवयः सं शिशीत वाशीभिः अमृताय तक्षथ
विद्रांसः पदा गुह्यानि कर्तन येन देवासः अमृतञ्च वानशुः ॥’

(10.53.10)

Translated :

‘Tvaṣṭr most deft of workmen, knew each magic art,
bringing most blessed bowls that hold the drink of gods.

His axe, wrought of good metal, he is sharpening now,
wherewith the radiant Brāhmaṇaspati will cut.' (10.53.9)

'Now, O ye Sapient Ones, make ye the axes sharp wherewith
ye fashion bowls to hold the Amṛta.
Knowing the secret places make ye ready that whereby
the Gods have gotten immortality.' (10.53.10)

(The verses are fairly clear. Tvaṣṭr is about to create time out of the Absolute Immortality, which has been so far kept in secrecy. For this, he has to 'cut up the Cup', and it is Brāhmaṇaspati,—a touch of priestly religion here,—who is fashioning the axe wherewith it will be cut. The 'Sapient Ones' who will carry out the act are the Ṛbhus.).

This Cup of Immortal (ETERNAL) time is referred to in other passages also, such as 1.110.5, 1.161.4, 4.33.5 and so on. In fact, Hymn 1.161 takes up the tale and proceeds further. Agni comes to the Ṛbhus with a message from the gods telling them to make FOUR cups out of this primeval ONE, and promising them as a reward their elevation to the status of devas (1.161.2). They proceed to do so, as 1.161.3 tells us, by first 'building' a cow, a horse and a chariot.

'एकं चमसं चतुरः कृणोतन तत् वः देवाः अब्रुवन् तत् वः आ अगमं
सौघन्वनाः यदि एव करिष्यथ साकं देवैः यज्ञियासः भविष्यथ ॥' (1.161.2)

'अग्निं दूतं प्रति यत् अब्रवीतन अश्वः कर्त्तव्यः रथः उत इह कर्त्तव्यः
घेनुः कर्त्वा द्वा तानि भ्रातः अनु वः कृत्वी आ इमसि ॥' (1.161.3)

Translated :

'The chalice that is single make ye into four : thus have
the Gods commanded ; therefore, am I come.
If, O Sudhanvan's Children, ye will do this thing ye shall
participate in sacrifice with Gods.'

(1.161.2)

'What to the envoy in reply ye spake, A courser must be made, a chariot fashioned here,

A cow must be created, and the Twain made young, when we have done these things, Brother, we return to you.'

(1.161.3)

(The chariot is for world's time to move in, and the horse and cow are the sun and moon who will jointly keep time moving. The Rg Veda uses the terms 'bull', 'horse' and 'cow' as metaphors rather freely to signify many things, and indiscriminately the sun may be a horse or a cow (or a bull), and so also the moon. The creation of the Sun, and the Moon, is not the work of Rbhus alone. Agni, Indra and Aditi, as also the Ādityas, helped in the matter.).

How the three aspects of world time came into being is clearly expressed in 4.33.5, which is a very important verse.

ज्येष्ठः आह चमसा द्वा कर इति कनीयान् त्रीन् कुण्वाम इति आह
कनिष्ठः आह चतुरः कर इति त्वष्टा ऋभवः तत् पनयत् वचः वः ॥'

(4.33.5)

'Two beakers let us make,—thus said the eldest. Let us make three, this was the younger's sentence.

Four beakers let us make,—thus spoke the youngest.

Tvaṣṭr approved this rede of yours, O Rbhus.'

(4.33.5)

(Making two beakers out of one, obviously is the first step to creating world-time out of Immortal time. Three are made, when the world-time is split into past, and present, and the addition of future time makes four cups). Who are the eldest, younger and youngest Rbhus? Tentatively let me say that they are Rbhuksan, Vibhvan and Vāja respectively. Principally, the reason for assigning this order of seniority to them is based upon the fact that the Rbhus are later on said (verse 4.34.9) to have not only got the accolade for their work from the devas, but were also appointed as expert artificers to them, Rbhuksan (for Indra), Vibhvan (for Varuṇa), and Vāja (for the gods generally). Moreover, Rbhuksan is often identified with Indra, who is said to be their leader or chief and for whom the Rbhus are said to have fashioned two bay steeds (4.33.10, etc.).

I am fortified in my interpretation of the three cups (that is, cups other than the first, which represents immortality, as representing, past, present and future times, and linking them with Varuṇa, Indra, and other devas respectively) by verse 1.164.44 which reads :

‘ त्रयः केशिनः ऋतुष्या वि चक्षते संवत्सरे वपते एकः एषां
विश्वं एकः अभि चष्टे शचीभिः ध्राजिः एकस्य ददृशे न रूपं ॥ ’

(1.164.44)

Translated :

‘ Three with long tresses show in ordered season.
One of them sheareth when the year is ended,
One with his powers the Universe regardeth : of one
the sweep is seen, but not his figure.’

(1.164.44)

Griffith has translated the ‘ ṛtuthā ’ of the text as ‘ in ordered season ’, but it would be more consonant with the passage to translate it as ‘ at the due or proper time ’, which meaning is usually attributed to it in various other passages. The ‘ Three with long tresses ’ here mean the three divisions of time (tress, ‘ keśinah ’ here meaning something ‘ drawn out, waving forth,’ etc.) ; the first is past time at the end of which account is taken of things done, as, for example, Varuṇa does in the R.V. when he judges the actions of men ; the second is present time, when the ever-active Indra surveys with his powers the world of which he is lord ; and the third is future time, about which we know nothing except that it will sweep down on us, the future events being entirely in the lap of the gods.

Further details of the function and role of the Rbhus in setting the wheel of time in motion, and ensuring, with the help of other Powers, that it functions in an orderly and rhythmic manner will be discussed in the following studies in this Series. Now, we shall consider only what happened immediately after the Rbhus had made the four cups, and what functions still remained to Tvaṣṭr thereafter.

The Rg Veda presents in very dramatic language the immediate results of the ‘ desecration of the cup of the devas.’

Verse 1.161.4 (2nd line), for example says :

‘यदा अवऽअख्यत् चमसान् चतुरः कृतान् भात् इत् त्वष्टा ग्रासु
अंतः नि आनजे ॥’

(2nd line of 1.161.4.)

‘Then, Tvaṣṭr, when he viewed the four wrought chalices,
concealed himself among the Consorts of the Gods.’

(2nd line of Stanza 1.161.4)

(There is also an astronomical connection with this myth which will be discussed in Studies in later Series.).

It is even said, in 4.33.6, that Tvaṣṭr was ‘moved with envy’. Be that as it may, what happened was that, finding himself deprived of his powers over Time, Tvaṣṭr turned his attention to his other function, namely the generating of life on earth. The phrase ‘concealed himself among the Consorts of the Gods’ implies this, but it is also very specifically and directly stated, as for example, in 3.4.9, or even better 1.188.9, which I quote :

‘त्वष्टा रुणणि हि प्रऽभुः प्रभून् विश्वान् संऽआनजे
तेषां नः स्फार्ति आ यज ॥’

(1.188.9)

‘Tvaṣṭr the Lord hath made all forms and all the
cattle of the field ;
Cause them to multiply for us.’

(1.188.9)

Even Yama and Yami (Yama is the first of mortals) were made consorts in the womb itself (10.10.5) by Tvaṣṭr who ‘shapes all forms.’ Other exploits of his in this direction will be discussed in later studies.

As for the Rbhus, verse 1.161.5, which follows verse 1.161.4 already quoted sums up matters :

‘हनाम एनान् इति त्वष्टा यत् अब्रवीत् चमसं ये देवऽपानं अग्निदिषुः
अन्या नामानि कृण्वते सुते सचा अन्यैः एनान् कन्या नामऽभिः स्परत् ॥’

(1.161.5)

As Tvaṣṭr thus had spoken, Let us slay these men
 who have reviled the chalice, the drinking-cup of Gods,
 They gave themselves new names when Soma juice
 was shed, and under these new names the Maiden
 welcomed them.'

(1.161.5)

(The reference to Soma juice indicates that they had become devas, as already mentioned. Due to this, their function in regulating time on earth was remitted to other new powers, namely the Rtus, as we shall see later, which is what is meant by saying 'they gave themselves new names.' The Maiden here is Uṣas, who is not only the Dawn of every day, but more especially the Dawn of the New Year).

Rbhus became devas as a reward for dividing Time into four sections (thus enabling the coming into being of Life), but before doing so, they had to spend a year on earth organising, with the aid of other devas, the three elements of time experienced in life, namely the past, the present and the future, so that everything functioned in an orderly and rhythmic manner. How this was effected will be detailed in the following studies. Verses 4.33.4 and 10 may serve as introductory material to this, better than other verses which also refer to the subject. They read :

यत् संज्वत्सं ऋभवः गां अरक्षन् यत् संज्वत्सं ऋभवः माः अपिशन्
 यत् संज्वत्सं अभरन् भासः अस्याः तामिः शमीभिः अमृतज्वं आशुः ।

(4.33.4)

ये हरी मेघया उक्था मदंतः इंद्राय चक्रुः सुज्युजा ये अश्वा
 ते रायः पोषं द्रविणानि अस्मे घत्त ऋभवः क्षेमज्यंतः न मितं ॥

(4.33.10)

Translated :

'As for a year the Rbhus kept the Milch-cow,
 throughout a year fashioned and formed her body,
 And through a year's space still sustained her brightness,
 through these their labours they were made immortal.'

(4.33.4)

'They who, made glad with sacrifice and praises, wrought the
Bays, his docile steeds, for Indra—
Rbhus, as those who wish a friend to prosper, bestow
us gear and growth of riches.'

(4.33.10)

I will revert to the subject of Rbhus after first describing in the succeeding Study how the devas introduced the Principle of Order in Nature, which governs also man's relation with the Powers of Nature, that is, in other words, with themselves.

RG VEDIC STUDIES III.2.

RTA, VRATA AND DHARMA

The Rg Veda uses three terms to describe order in nature, and man's place therein. They are *rta*, *vrata*, and *dharma* (ऋत, व्रत and धर्म). Of these, *vrata* and *dharma* have survived in modern Indian languages, though with meanings differing to a greater or less extent from what they enjoy in the Rg Veda. On the other hand, the word *rta* is no longer to be seen; it suffered decay along with the Vedic language; its various meanings were distributed between the other two, namely *vrata* and *dharma*; one of its derivatives, namely *ṛtu*, has had a continuing existence into modern times, and its use in the Rg Veda will form the subject of a later study, the present one being concerned only with the other three, namely, *rta*, *vrata* and *dharma*.

General Observations :

In the Rg Vedic text itself, a clear distinction exists between the significance attached to these words, which, however, has not been fully appreciated by Western scholars, due to cultural differences. The varying concepts underlying these words find no corresponding counterparts in the other cultures, and consequently there are no suitable words in the other languages to bring out the nuances in meaning. Commentators who have broken through the cultural barriers are able to escape this dilemma by elaborate discussions, whenever the words come up, but in translations of the texts, this device is not available. Translators cannot resort to more than one or two words to convert single words in textual passages from one language to another. For example, Law, Holy Law, commandment, statute, Order, Truth, etc., are all indiscriminately used in English translations for all three words appearing in the text. The result is that the reader finds the whole thing repetitive, dull, and lacking in sense. The spirit and message of the original is totally lost, and the accusation that the Rg Veda is, except for a few verses, just a collection of 'childish' (as Max Müller called it) prattle, seems on the face of it, justified.

The three words, *ṛta*, *vrata* and *dharma*, are not synonymous, and to treat them as if they were so is to do grave injustice to the text. These are culture-laden words, with individual personalities of their own, each being a multifaceted unit.

Ṛta occurs some 600 times in the *Rg Veda*, as against 129 of *vrata* and 52 of *dharma*. Quite obviously, the *Rg Vedic* people attached the greatest importance to the concepts underlying the word *ṛta*. These concepts are indeed many, some being commonly shared with *vrata*, and others with *dharma*. On about half-a-dozen occasions each, *dharma* and *ṛta* combine with 'satyam', which is the only word which ordinarily finds an almost exact equivalent in the English language as 'truth'. But in these cases where *satyam* (or its derivatives) is combined respectively with *ṛta* and *dharma* (or their derivatives), it assumes a significance which is brought out in the English translation by making the initial letter 't' assume the capital form, namely T. Thereby it signifies something 'eternal, permanent, etc.', lying outside the range of the created Universe, and of passing time. Otherwise, that is, when not appearing alongside the word 'satyam', the other three words signify concepts which are time-bound, having come into existence along with, or after creation, and subject to annihilation in the ultimate extinction of the Universe, a fate to which 'satyam' as Truth, (with a capital T), is not subject.

It will facilitate a clear appreciation of the points that will be made in the discussion on which I will now embark if I explain at the outset some of the basic ideas of the structure of the world, and its manner of functioning, which underly the *Rg Vedic* thought and which find expression in the words, *ṛta*, *vrata* and *dharma*. My understanding of these ideas is reached, not by any *a priori* argument, but by a rigorous and detailed examination of the relevant textual material, as I will show later on. I am not fitting facts into pre-conceived notions. I have reached the conclusions after exhaustive studies, but it would tax the patience of the most eager students of the *Rg Veda* if I were to ask them to first go step by step through the analysis before reaching the thread (or threads) which bring them together.

Briefly put, my method has been to take each and every verse (or stanza) where the words under discussion occur in the text,

study them in their context, place them in separate groups, according to the ideas common to them, and then draw the final conclusion. To me, this seems to be the only way to penetrate the mind of the Rg Vedic people, who have, for whatever reason it may be, thought it fit to couch their thoughts in language which mystifies us. It is true that in the 10th Mandala, and in some verses of the 1st Mandala also, these thoughts are somewhat more openly expressed, but it can be shown that these ideas are not unique to those sections only, but are to be found all over the other passages also. My studies reveal to me that the mythology-laden, mysterious passages say the same thing, though not in the same direct language, as the more 'metaphysical' ones. One thing, however, must be most emphatically expressed, even at the outset, that there is not one strand of thought but many, which intertwine in the text, and it is one of the principal tasks of these studies to unwind and separate them. The historical or other reasons which have brought about this syncretism are matters for separate examination.

The questions which dominate the Rg Vedic thought in a manner almost leading to an obsession are simple: 'What is this world; how did it come into being; what was it like before coming into existence, what Power or Powers govern it; how is it operated; how did men and life originate, in what manner can man relate himself to the governing Powers, and how finally can man find Immortality, and escape the fearful prospect that death holds out to him?'

These are simple questions, asked by every man in every society. But there are no final answers, simple or otherwise. The Rg Vedic people naturally have their answer, or rather many answers, but it is quite clear that they themselves are conscious of the inadequacy of their own answers. Nevertheless, they have made their views available to mankind. It requires extra-ordinary effort to understand what they say, but when it is fully understood, the effort required to do so is found to be eminently worthwhile.

In Study numbered 2, in the FIRST Series (Rg Vedic Studies I.2, 'Jyoti in the Rg Veda'), I had pointed out that the Rg Vedic view of the Universe is a unique one, where Jyoti and its shadow, Tamas, are in eternal monistic-dualistic co-existence. This view persists throughout the Rg Veda, even if presented in different

symbolic expressions, such as Hiranyagarbha and so on. In my studies numbers 3 to 5 of the same FIRST Series, I have developed this theme further, as the Rg Veda goes on to describe how Agni came into being, and thereafter, Indra and the Ādityas, to create earth, heaven and antarikṣa, night and day, sun, moon and stars.

The present Study, and this third Series in which it appears, take up the developments from where the first series ended. I now deal with those passages which explain how nature functions, and creation operates, as also what are the Powers and who the responsible devas are. How man and life came into being will form the subject of a later series, but man also enters into the discussions in this series, since his relationship with the Powers (and devas) form an integral part of the thesis delineating the operations of natural forces.

According to the Rg Vedic people, everything in nature is governed by ṛta, to which even the devas are subject, even though the devas themselves are endowed with, or rather, to use a term drawn from another discipline, 'delegated' sufficient powers over defined and specific operations. Here a certain ambivalence is noticeable in the textual phraseology. Overlapping of concepts occurs between the three words ṛta, vrata and dharma, but only to a certain limited extent and in separately identifiable manner.

The problem arises from the question: 'What is the nature of ṛta?' There is no attempt in the texts either to notice or meet the problem. It is something given, a regulatory process in natural operations. But the next question that follows naturally, namely, how did it (ṛta) come into being, is taken serious notice of by the Rg Veda. Two alternative solutions are offered. First is a mythological one, and the second a natural one. It is the mythological view which dominates the textual passages, but there is every evidence to show that even the Rg Vedic ṛsis were not quite happy with it, and so emerges the second, namely the Law of Nature view.

The mythological view of ṛta logically gives rise to the vrata concept, and though the two are different, and each has its own definite and clearly discernible features which are not fully shared by the other, the text finds it difficult to maintain the difference always. What these are will be discussed shortly. They are

complex, and elaborate, and being dependent upon mythological thought and expression; lean heavily on symbolism.

The Law of Nature view is much less simple, and here a certain amount of overlapping does occur between dharma and rta.

Dharma :

From the time of the Rg Veda onwards, dharma has become an integral part of all religious thought, whether Hindu (Vedic or Āgamic), or Buddhist or Jain. It is the one word, which along with ' karma ' is to be found on the lips of every Hindu to-day, and also many Indians not belonging to that faith.

In the process it has gathered various meanings but most of them appear in an incipient stage in the Rg Veda.

Dharma personified as a deva (Dharmarāja of later times) appears in Rg Vedic Verse 8.35.13. In the so-called ' Funeral Hymn ', the word seems to signify dharma as the deva of death to be followed by the dead on the path to heaven (Verse 10.56.3). (Yama in later Hinduism is Dharmarāja, and is the judge of human actions). This is even more clear in 10.16.3, where a man, after death, is said to go to earth or heaven according to the merit of his actions in life. I cannot, at this stage, pass on without referring to 1.55.3, where karma and dharma appear in the same verse in a manner which seem to establish a link between the two. The two sections of the verse addressed to Indra read ' mahā nṛmanasya dharmanām irajyasi ' and ' viśvamai ugrah karmāne purohitah '. It seems to me that Indra's power is attributed to his having accumulated more dharma than others due to his deeds. (However, other translations are also possible and have in fact I must, confess, been generally adopted.)

Dharma as custom or tradition appears in a few passages such as 3.17.1, (where the ritual worship of Agni is said to be an ancient custom, dharma), and 3.17.5. Verses 1.164.43 and 50 are even more clear in this respect, and 10.90.16 (from the Puruṣa Sūkta) talks of the sacrifice of a victim as the ' earliest holy custom, (dharma) '.

There is a touch of the belief in the natural quality of things, that is to say, the concept that things are what they are because

that is their nature (dharma), in Verses such as 8.6.20, 1.159.3, 5.15.2, 9.97.12 and so on. Perhaps the best example of this is the second line of 3.60.6.

‘इमानि तुभ्यं स्वसराणि येमिरे व्रता देवानां मनुषः च धर्मंभिः ॥’

(2nd line of 3.60.6)

‘These homes wherein we dwell have turned themselves to thee,—devotions to the devas, as laws of men ordain’

(2nd line of 3.60.6)

Here *vrata manuṣaḥ* has been translated as ‘laws of men’, that is, ‘custom or tradition of men’. I think ‘this is not the exact import of the verse, which seems to signify that it is the ‘nature’ (dharma) of men to turn to devas.

Verse 5.15.2 is equally interesting :

‘ऋतेन ऋतं धरुण धारयंत यज्ञस्य शाके परमे विऽजोमन्
दिवः धर्मेन् धरुणे सेदुषः नृन् जातं अजातान् अभि ये ननक्षुः ॥’

(5.15.2)

Translated :

‘By holy Law they kept supporting Order, by help of
sacrifice in loftiest heaven,—

They who attained with born men to the unborn,
men seated on that stay, heaven’s firm sustainer.’

(5.15.2.)

(The translation, it must be accepted, is somewhat stilted).

(It is dharma which sustains the heaven, and it is for this purpose that the (ṛtena) rituals are conducted so that the ṛta, the regulating powers, may function. Here, we see the ritualists’ attempt to link his rites with the dharma, or nature’s laws, as if without the rites performed by him, nature would collapse. Here is, in the nascent stage, what develops in due course as the spirit of the Brāhmaṇa section of the Vedas, which assumes for the sacrifice-rituals the power to order the devas about.)

There is one extremely interesting verse, which I would like very much to discuss, but do so here with some hesitation, as the

symbolisms appearing in it have to be gone into very thoroughly. The verse 9.97.12 reads :

‘अभि प्रियाणि पवते पुनानः देदः देवान् स्वेन रमेन पंचन्
इंदुः धर्माणि ऋतुञ्जया वसानः दश क्षिपः अव्यत सानो अव्ये ॥’

(9.97.12)

Translated :

‘Clothed in pleasant radiance suited to the seasons,
the sportive Indu flows purified, reaching
the gods with its juice ; the ten fingers guide
it to the elevated fleece.’

(9.97.12)

(I have preferred Wilson's translation here, as being more true to the text. The 'flowing Indu' is the moon, whose radiance changes with the seasons, as any one can see even now. The 'elevated fleece' is the sky, and 'the ten fingers' constitute the Universe ; the underlying symbolism of this concept requires some detailed explanation which I shall provide elsewhere. The metaphors and similes adopted by the composer are those adopted in the Soma ritual. Given these comments, we can see how the Natural Law concept operates and how the resort to myths is abandoned here.) I can also appeal to verses 9.7.1 and 9.110.4, which clearly indicate that the path of Soma (here the Moon) is governed by 'dharma', a purely naturalistic concept, free of myths.

About 39 of the remaining verses in which 'dharma' appears are devoted to assigning powers of control over nature and the world to various devas. Only Soma, Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Savitar, Agni and Vāyu have this privilege. Mythology appears here, and the concept of devas exercising control and regulating matters is similar to that which prevails with ṛta. Dharma and ṛta come close here, the former applying to the overall situation, and the latter to the parts which make up the whole.

There is, however, still one very important facet of dharma which distinguishes it from ṛta even in the Rg Veda. As we will see later, ṛta emerges from Aditi and Dakṣa, as a Power which this couple release when the world came into being. This is mythology. Dharma, however, is dependent upon no mythic devas.

Its birth, and existence are natural. The verse which makes this abundantly clear is 10.170.2, which reads :

‘विष्मद् बृहत् सुष्मृतं वाजसातमं धर्मेन् धरुणे सत्यं अर्पितं
अमित्रं दस्युर्हन्तमं ज्योतिः जज्ञे असुरं सप्ततं ॥’

(10.170.2)

Translated :

‘Radiant, as high Truth, cherished, best at winning
strength,
Truth based upon the stature that supports the heavens,
He rose, a light, that kills Vṛtras and enemies, best
slayer of the Dasyus, Asuras and foes.’

(10.170.2)

(In spite of the unsatisfactory nature of the translation, the essential points are clear enough. The verse tells us whence Indra’s strength is derived, and what he did with it. Leaving aside the latter aspect which belongs to the category of myths, we find that the mightiest power in the Universe is dharman, and it sprang out of ‘jyoti’. No mythology here, but a most brilliant idea !)

Rta :

I now turn to rta

The material concerning rta to be found in the Rg Veda is so vast that it would require a large volume by itself to discuss all of them. As I have already explained, there are 600 verses in which the word occurs at least once, and in many of them, there are multiple references also. The range of topics covered by the term is very wide. To compress all this in one brief study is impossible. I have necessarily to limit myself only to the most important facets, and to a select number of supporting verses which provide the evidence.

There is plenty of evidence in the text to show that much debate had taken place amongst the ṛsis themselves in regard to nature, origin, etc. of rta. Hymn 1.105 by itself, in verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12 and 15, furnishes much material. Verse 4 asks : ‘Where is the ancient rta ? Who is its new dispenser ?’ Verse 5 goes further : ‘What count ye as rta and what as unṛta ? Where is my ancient call (belief) ?’ Verse 6 has another problem : ‘What is the basis

for *ṛta*?' and 'What are the obstructions that lie in the path of one who wishes to travel to Aryaman (the saviour)?' Verse 15 makes a positive averment: 'It is Varuṇa who makes the holy prayer Let sacred worship rise anew (to him).' Hymns 10.124 and 4.42 establish this further; the former refers to a dispute as to whether it is Agni or Indra who has the superior *ṛta*, and the latter to a similar one as between Indra and Varuṇa. (Quite obviously behind these debates on concepts lies the more immediate question as to which of these devas takes precedence in the relevant rites, involving the prestige, power and income of the disputing priests.)

All aspects of *ṛta* are explained in terms of myths, in contrast to 'dharma'. The coming into being of *ṛta* from Dakṣa and Aditi is explained best in verses 10.65.8 and 6.16.35, and it is linked with the birth of the Lord of *Rta*, who in the former case is deemed to be Agni, and in the latter, Varuṇa. In the latter case (6.16.35), it is said that Agni, as soon as he was born, (by a mythological incestuous relationship between his Father's Father and his Mother, the meaning of which has already been explained by me in my Studies in the FIRST Series) was installed in the seat of *Rta*, thus becoming its Lord, and Dispenser. On the other hand, in verse 10.65.8, it is Varuṇa to whom such Power over *ṛta* is passed on. This appears to be a reference to the dispute between Agni and Varuṇa as to who is to be the Lord of *ṛta*. (Vide comments above on hymn 10.124.)

While there are a few verses which favour Varuṇa's authority, the bulk of the passages assert Agni's supremacy. The best argument in favour of Varuṇa is to be found in 5.66.1, where Varuṇa is identified with *ṛta* itself, by the statement that 'Varuṇa's Form is *ṛta*'. But, in over 50 or 60 verses, it is Agni who is assured of his authority. He is the 'Primeval Germ of *Rta*' in 9.68.5, as also in 10.5.7. I quote the latter verse:

‘असत् च सत् च परमेऽग्रमन् दक्षस्य जन्मन् अदितेः उपऽस्ये
अग्निः ह नः प्रथमज्जाः ऋतस्य पूर्वे आयुनि ब्रूषभः च धेनुः ॥’

(10.5.7)

'Not being, Being in the highest heaven, in Aditi's
bosom and in Dakṣa's birthplace,
Is Agni, our first born of Holy Order, the Milch-cow
and the Bull in life's beginning.'

(10.5.7)

(The Holy Order is ṛta, and Agni is an androgyne here.)

Besides being their guide, Agni is the TONGUE of the devas as many verses including 6.21.11 assert. The term 'tongue' here does not refer to the flames of the sacrificial fire, as is assumed by commentators ; it is a symbol for the concept that the commandments or regulations of the other devas are communicated to men only through Agni. (It is through Agni's power that sound, and speech, including the sacred akṣara, and music are all produced, and Agni as Vāyu carries them (8.26.21) from person to person, including the devas. These matters will be gone into by me in detail, quoting chapter and verse, in studies of later series.) In 1.36.19, it is Manu who established Agni as a light of ṛta for all men.

The Rg Veda has another approach also to the problem of the origin of ṛta. In verses 10.190.1, this is attributed to Agni's birth, but here the form in which Agni comes as ṛta is the result of, 'tapas'. Whose tapas this is is not clear, but from 10.137.4, we may take it that it is the first 'Muni' whose tapas produced this result. 10.187.1 also talks of 'tapas' producing Agni, but there the purpose is causing fertility and creating progeny. (I shall at the appropriate place in a later Study produce evidence to show that this first Muni is Rudra. Mandala 10 is usually stated by scholars to be a later innovation. I do not go into the question here, but shall merely point out that the term 'Muni' appears in 8.17.14 as also in 7.56.8. The whole subject requires a detailed analysis to ascertain how this strand of thought has entered into the Rg Veda.)

Agni, then, is finally accepted as the undisputed Lord of ṛta, and he has his seat at the centre of the Universe (7.60.5, 3.54.6, 4.1.12, and so on.).

‘प्र शर्घः भार्ते प्रथमं विपन्या ऋतस्य योनां वृषभस्य नीळे ॥’

(1st line of 4.1.12)

Translated :

‘Wondrously first he rose aloft, defiant, in the Bull’s
lair, the home of Holy Order.’

(1st line of 4.1.12)

(‘He’ here is Agni who is also called the Bull.)

Though he is the Lord of *ṛta*, and its supreme Dispenser, Agni achieves results by delegating powers to various other devas, such as Soma, Vāyu, Aśvins, Maruts, Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman, Pūṣan, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, Indra, Gandharva, (who this is will be explained in a later study), Brhaspati, Heaven and Earth and so on. It is impossible to quote all the relevant verses; they are so many and a selection will not do full justice. However, I give as samples, 1.23.5, 4.42.4, 10.47.6, 5.57.8, 6.55.9, 10.80.6, and so on.

Each deva has a specified sphere of action where the *ṛta* assigned to him is to be applied. Varuṇa, Mitra and Aryaman control the paths of the Sun, Moon, Stars and day and night, (they are said also to decide the time when worship is to be conducted—8.27.19.). Sarasvatī or Vāk controls voice, speech or music, Brhaspati, prayers, Gandharva, marriage, Indra, darkness and light, and so on. Sometimes, they are said to act as charioteers in the matter. Agni is the best of charioteers (5.7.3 for example), but Pūṣan, and Varuṇa are also charioteers.

The priests who were well-versed in all this lore, are the Angirases (10.67.2, 1.71.3, 5.12.6, and so on), who are in fact the Rg Vedic astronomers, as testified by verses such as 3.31.9.

It is time I explained what is the nature (or essence) of *ṛta* in the view of the Rg Veda, which does not say it in so many words, but gives sufficient indications from which we may draw appropriate inferences. I lead off with verse 10.85.1 :

‘सत्येन उत्तमिता भूमिः सूर्येण उत्तमिता द्यौः
ऋतेन अदित्याः तिष्ठन्ति दिवि सोमः अग्निं ब्रितः ॥’

(10.85.1)

‘Truth is the base that bears the earth; by Surya are
the heavens sustained;

By Law the Ādityas stand secure ; and Soma holds his place in heaven'

(10.85.1)

(' Law ' here refers to ṛta.)

Verses 4.23.8, 9 and 10 cover the whole range.

‘ ऋतस्य हि शुद्धः संति पूर्वाः ऋतस्य घीतिः वृजिनानि ह्वंति
ऋतस्य श्लोकः बधिरा ततर्द कर्णा बुध्नानः शुचमानः आयोः ॥ ’

(4.23.8)

‘ ऋतस्य दृढां धरुणानि संति पुरुणि चंद्रा वपुषे वपूषि
ऋतेन दीर्घं दृषणंत पृक्षः ऋतेन गावः ऋतं आ विवेशुः ॥ ’

(4.23.9)

‘ ऋतं येमानः ऋतं इत् वनीति ऋतस्य शुष्मः तुरज्याः ऊं गव्युः
ऋताय पृथ्वी बहुले गभीरे ऋताय घेनू परमे दुहाते ॥ ’

(4.23.10)

‘ Eternal Law hath varied food that strengthens ; thought of
eternal Law removes transgressions.

The praise-hymn of eternal Law, arousing, glowing,
hath oped the deaf ears of the living.’

(4.23.8)

‘ Firm-seated are eternal Law’s foundations ; in its
fair form are many splendid beauties.

By holy Law long lasting food they bring us ; by holy
Law have cows come to our worship.’

(4.23.9)

‘ Fixing eternal Law he, too, upholds it ; swift moves
the might of Law and wins the booty.

To Law belongs the vast deep Earth and Heaven : Milch-
kine supreme, to Law their milk they render.’

(4.23.10)

(Griffith could well have used the word ‘ ṛta ’ as such in his translation, instead of trying to render it into English as ‘ eternal Law ’. Provided we realise that the terms ‘ food ’, ‘ cows ’, ‘ booty ’, ‘ milk ’, etc. are being used in a symbolic sense, we have here as good a description of the nature and powers of ṛta, as we can find anywhere else.)

Rta is that which introduces order into created (by Tvaṣṭṛ and the Rbhus) time, keeps up the rythm of life, and brings into existence the seasons.

‘द्वादशस्परं नहि तत् जराय वर्वति चक्रं परि द्यां ऋतस्य
आ पुत्राः अग्ने मिथुनासः अत्र सप्त शतानि विशतिः च तस्थुः ॥’

(1.164.11)

‘Formed with the twelve spokes, by length of time,
unweakened, rolls round the heaven, this wheel of during
Order. Herein established, joined in pairs together, seven
hundred Sons and twenty stand, O Agni.’

(1.164.11)

(This verse will be discussed in great detail in a later Study.)

Vrata, Rta and Rituals :

The clever Angirasa priests who, as mentioned earlier, were the astronomers who discovered these facts, and developed the theory of rta, proceeded to find a practical use for these ideas, and for this theory of rta. They linked it with another doctrine, termed ‘vrata’, as verse 3.4.7 tells us :

‘देव्या होतारा प्रथमा नि ऋजे सप्त पृक्षासः स्वधया मदति
ऋतं इत् ते आहुः अनु व्रतं व्रतज्ञाः दीध्यानाः ॥’

(3.4.7)

‘I crave the grace of heaven’s two chief Invokers :
the seven swift steeds joy in their wonted manner.
These speak of truth, praising the truth eternal,
thinking on Order as the guards of Order.’

(3.4.7)

The ‘two chief Invokers’ could be Agni and Varuṇa ; Griffith translates ‘sapta prkṣāsa’ of the text as ‘swift steeds’, and Wilson as ‘offerers of oblations’, which is certainly much better. But to me, it appears that the term refers to ‘hymns of praise’, which quite obviously ought to be more pleasing to these devas, Powers, than material oblations. As for (prkṣāsah), I must quote the dictionary to say that it means food, oblation, ‘something pleasing to receive’ and so on.

Agni and Varuṇa being the chief lords of rta, the verse in effect means that the priests have conjoined this concept with that of

'vrata', which Griffith unfortunately translates as, and makes it out to be, 'eternal Law'. He would have done better by using the term as it is, without translation. The nature and other aspects of 'vrata' will be gone into later, but first let us see in what manner and why this linkage has been effected.

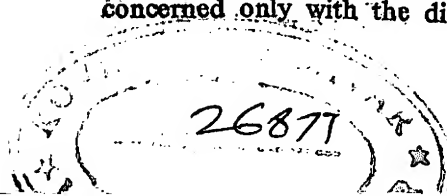
First of all, *ṛta* was personified, and made into a deva, *Rta* (10.66.4), and given the same status as any other deva, but being derived from *Agni*, the foremost deva, *Rta* in turn acquired *Agni*'s characteristics and Power. The other devas now have to obey *Rta* (7.56.12, the Maruts), (5.80.1—Dawn), (8.75.5—Savitar), (*Indra*—10.73.5) and (*Rbhus*—1.161.9), to quote only a few examples. *Agni* himself is subject to this *Rta* (1.79.3).

The next step was to equate *Rta* with the rites. In innumerable verses this equation is stressed, and for each deva is formulated a rite, the performance of which is supposed to control the operations of that deva. Thus, the Maruts exercise the *ṛta* assigned to them in their sphere of power in favour of the man who worships them properly in the prescribed rite (10.78.2), and similarly the Dawns (7.39.1), *Āsvins* (10.143.1), the Fathers (10.15.1) (*pitr*) and so on; *Agni* unites the devas with their respective 'patnis' (1.14.7), the paradigm for all human marriages, which also now come within the scope of *Rta* (10.5.2.). And as for sex and sexual cohabitation, *Agastya* demonstrates the power of *ṛta* and rites in hymn 1.179, and *Yama* appeals to *Rta*, when he contemplates incest (10.10.4). Finally, Immortality, the supreme aspirations of the *Rg Vedic* people, as indeed of all human beings, can be, achieved, if the proper rite which possesses the necessary *ṛta* is performed (6.59.4). A rite, any rite, which is not performed in the proper manner, results in *Agni*'s noose falling on the wrong-doer (10.87.11.).

Such is the power of the rite (as conducted by the priests). When *vrata* (which is in the main a personal worship of the individual) is linked to it, the combination gains strength which is the automatic regulatory mechanism over what came into being when the Universe emerged out of *Aditi* and *Dakṣa*.

Vrata :

With *vrata*, man enters into the picture. *Rta* by itself was concerned only with the divine Powers and their impact on the



natural order of things, what we to-day would call nature. Vrata on the other hand was the means through which man established a relationship with the devas administering the world of nature so that by this form of worship he could ensure that things went in his favour, the way he wanted them to go. Vrata did not bring the devas under men's control ; on the contrary, he recognised their supremacy (subject only to the hierarchy that prevails within their world), and humbly solicited their grace.

The Angirases made the situation more complex by linking ṛta (the principle of order) with Rta, the deva, who was made subordinate to the sacrificial rituals, thus bringing the other devas also under their control. That was their, the devas', vrata. Now the man who practised the vrata form of worship could strengthen his case by submitting himself to the sacrificial rituals, to which the devas had also necessarily to submit.

The first thing we have to note here is that a vrata is in its simplest sense a form of worship which men, as individuals, offered to the devas of their choice. It is a simple individualistic form of worship, free of the elaborate devices of the sacrificial ritual. There are not many verses which could be quoted in evidence of this. Quite obviously, it would not have been to the interest of the redactors of the Rg Veda, when the verses were brought together in the great synod of ṛsis, to have left any such evidence, as the vrata concept stands basically contrary to the sacrificial rites. Nevertheless, some verses seem to have escaped from the keen eye of the revisioners, or perhaps they had to let them remain, either because the proponents of the vrata required it, or because the vrata worship had already taken too strong a hold amongst the Rg Vedic people to be eliminated altogether.

Verse 1.93.8 is one example of a passage giving us a glimpse into the true nature of a vrata :

‘यः अनीषोमा हविषा सपर्यात् देवद्रीचा मनसा यः धृतेन
तस्य व्रतं रक्षतं पातं अंहसः विशे जनाय महि शर्म यच्छतं ॥’

(1.93.8)

‘Whoso with oil and poured oblation honours, with god-devoted heart, Agni and Soma—Protect his

sacrifice (!), preserve him from distress,
grant to the sacrificer (!) great felicity'.

(1.93.8)

(Griffith has done a disservice by first of all translating 'vratam' in the second line as sacrifice, and secondly by introducing the word 'sacrificer' in the same line, for which he has no authority in the text, where a simple 'him' is all that is warranted or at the best 'that man'. These irregularities have resulted in the main points of the verse being missed.)

What is specially being stressed in the verse are two things. Firstly, a man must have, while conducting his vrata, his heart wholly directed to the divine, and secondly, the ritual needs only oil and ghee ('poured oblations') to the chosen deity (perhaps there was an idol), but no more, certainly not the fire and the elaborate recitations and acts of the sacrificial rite. A vrata is as simple as that.

How is a 'vrata worship' conducted? Verses 3.59.2 and 3 tell us something about it :

‘प्र सः मित्र मर्तेः अस्तु प्रयस्वान् यः ते आदित्य शिक्षति व्रतेन
न हन्यते न जीयते त्वाऽऽतः न एनं अंहः अश्नोति अतितः न दूरात् ॥’
(3.59.2)

‘अनमीवासः श्लया मदतः मितज्ञवः वरिमन् आ पृथिव्याः
आदित्यस्य व्रतं उपऽक्षिरतः वयं मित्रस्य सुष्मतो स्याम ॥’
(3.59.3)

Translated :

‘Foremost be he who brings thee food, O Mitra, who
strives to keep thy sacred Law, Āditya.
He whom thou helpest ne'er is slain or conquered, on him,
from near or far, falls no affliction.’
(3.59.2)

‘Joying in sacred food and free from sickness, with knees
bent lowly on the earth's broad surface,
Following closely the Āditya's statute, may we remain in
Mitra's gracious favour.’
(3.59.3)

(The vrata to Mitra is observed by taking only sacred food, keeping good health,—perhaps yoga is meant here—and falling on bent knees before Mitra—quite likely, here also an idol or a picture was before the worshipper. This form of worship was perhaps observed, not only in the vrata to Mitra, but also to other devas.)

Vratas are observed in people's houses. Verse 3.60.6 which I have quoted earlier in another context says so. Addressing the R̥bhus, Indra, Vāja and Śaci, the vrata observer says : 'These homes wherein we dwell have turned themselves to thee.' In 1.183.3, the Aśvins are similarly called to the house of the person who is observing a vrata for his well-being and to get progeny.

Many are the devas who come to the aid of the people who observe their vratas. The most popular deva seems to be Soma (here obviously the Moon), as verse 9.35.6 indicates with admirable brevity.

‘ विश्वः यस्य व्रते जनः दाधार भर्मणः पतेः
पुनानस्य प्रभुञ्जसोः ॥ ’

(9.35.6)

‘ On the worship of whom all men fix their thoughts,—
the lord of pious acts, the purifier, the possessor of
abundant wealth ’.

‘ I have adopted Wilson's translation as being clearer than Griffith's. The ‘ purifier here refers to the Full Moon.)

Having very strictly kept the vows made in the vrata to Varuna, the pious man in verse 3.54.18 appeals to Aryaman and Aditi to give him progeny, and thus fulfil the object for which the vow was taken. Similarly, in the course of keeping the vow or vrata to Br̥haspati, a man says (2.23.6) :

‘ त्वं नः गोपाः पयिष्कृत् विश्वक्षणः तव व्रताय मतिःमिः जरामहे
बृहस्पते यः नः अभि हूरः दधे स्वा तं ममैर्तु दुच्छुना हरस्वती ॥ ’

(2.23.6)

‘ Though art our keeper, wise, preparer of our paths ; we
for thy service, sing to thee with hymns of praise.
Br̥haspati, whoever lays a snare for us, him may his
evil fate, precipitate, destroy.’

(2.23.6)

It is possible, through the power attained by a vrata, to destroy other people (10.166.4). There is information in 10.114.2 that vratas referred to therein are observed in secrecy (guhyesu vratesu) Verse 6.14.3 describes how people who observe vrata are looked after by devas at the expense of those who do not. The vow to Maruts gets boons (1.166.12), which even Indra cannot take away, for the Maruts have been endowed with powers covering the entire field which falls under the sway of Aditi from whom they derive their power through vrata.

Even devas obtain their power by keeping vratas or vows. Varuṇa and Sūrya, for example, derive their power by strictly observing vows (vratas) which they have made to Indra (1.101.3). (This is quite obviously a partisan view). Varuṇa is an awesome deity. He has a noose for non-observers of his vrata ; this vrata is most powerful when observed in the night since Varuṇa is lord of the night. Verse 8.41.7 says how even the other devas are subject to this rule :

‘यः आसु अत्कः आशये विश्वा जातानि एषां
परि धामानि मर्मृशत् वरुणस्य पुरः गये विश्वे देवाः अनु व्रतं नभंतां
अन्यके समे ॥’
(8.41.7)

‘He wraps these regions as a robe ; he contemplates
the tribes of Gods, and all the works of mortal men.
Before the home of Varuṇa all the Gods follow
his decree.’

(8.41.7)

(Varuṇa's robe is the dark sky, and his home is the night.)

These are a few out of the 130 or so verses which deal with vrata indicating it as a special form of worship, (the taking of, and observing vows to attain various objectives) adopted by men and devas. (Devas seek only power ; men's desires, however, are varied ; they extend to progeny, destruction of enemies, wealth, security, happiness in marriage, long life, immortality, and so on.)

I feel convinced with this mass of evidence before me that the sacrificial rites described in the Yajur Veda and the Brāhmaṇas were, as far as the Rg Veda is concerned, in existence, if at all,

only side by side with the vrata form of worship, which perhaps rose earlier than the former. At any rate, the vrata worship has outlasted the Vedic rituals. On the other hand, by the time the Rg Vedic redactors had taken up their task, a new religious practice, namely tapas, had become established as we find from some of the verses which I have quoted.

Whatever be the form of worship, whether tapas or vrata or yajña, the basic concept which validates them is the doctrine of ṛta, the orderly process in nature. The difference lies in the view taken on how this order is maintained, whether in a purely mechanical way, or by Powers operated by devas, which is a serious matter, for on this depends the methods and procedures which man should adopt to achieve his objectives. Rta is in turn subsumed under dharma.

RG VEDIC STUDIES

STUDY NO. III.3.

RBHUS

The term Rbhu is an artificial, manufactured word, formed by putting together the two words, 'r', meaning 'to go, to move' and 'bhu' from 'bhū', which, as a substantive (noun) (feminine), means 'world', 'earth', 'creation', and as verbal root, 'to be, to become, to happen, to come to pass', etc. The authors who made up this word had undoubtedly in their mind the concept of something 'moving, going along, happening, changing, etc.' The myths formed round this word make it clear that what they had in mind was the factor, or power, which we call Time which is eternally moving, and in the process changing the face of everything, creating new shapes and forms, nourishing them and finally destroying them.

The R.V. people used the metaphor (or symbol) of a cup to represent time, as I have already mentioned in Study III.1, on Tvastṛ, Father-time, for whom Infinity (or the timeless Time, which constitutes Immortality) was a sort of Cup. The Rbhhus make FOUR cups out of this original ONE, the four representing Immortality (Infinity), on the one hand, and the past, present and future of created time on the other. As a preliminary, they had also fashioned a chariot for time to move in, and built up the sun and moon, whose movements give rise to the flow of time. (Study III.1 may please be seen.).

(There is a contradiction here in that the R.V. speaks elsewhere of the sun and moon being created by Aditi and Dakṣa. Such paradoxes are not unusual in myths, and in this case, it is necessitated by the requirement to make the myths of each principle, Time, Light, Life, etc. self-consistent.)

The first characteristic to be noted about the Rbhhus is their close association with both Indra and Rudra. As far as Indra

is concerned, Macdonell has covered the subject in the following terms :

'They are very frequently invoked to come to the sacrifice (4.34.1 & 3, 4.37.1) and to drink the Soma juice (4.34.4, 4.36.2 and 7.48.1). Being high in heaven they are sought to come to the Soma in the lower abodes (4.37.3). In this they are generally associated with Indra (3.60.4, 5 and 6, 4.33.3, 4.34.6 and 4.35.7), a few times with the Maruts (1.20.5, 1.111.4 and 4.34.11), and once with the Ādityas, Savitr, Mountains and Rivers (4.34.8). In other respects also they are closely connected with Indra. They are Indra-like (4.37.5) and Rbhu is like a new Indra (1.110.7). With Indra they help mortals to victory (4.37.6) and are invoked with him to crush foes (7.48.3). They are said to have obtained the friendship of Indra by their skilful work (3.60.3, 4.35.7 & 9); for it is they who fashioned his steeds. In the hymns devoted to their praise, they are rarely invoked with gods other than Indra, there being only one such passage (4.34.8) in which Indra is not mentioned as well. Indra's connexion with them is indeed so characteristic, that he is, like the eldest of the triad, called 'chief of the Rbhus' ('rbhuksan'), a term also two or three times applied to Indra's associates, the Maruts.' (p. 131 of Macdonell's Vedic Mythology).

On the other hand, Macdonell has also pointed out (in the same page) that the Rbhus are 'about a dozen times called by the patronymic name of Saudhanvāna, son of Sudhanvan, 'the good archer.' The verses referred to are 3.60.4, 4.35.1, etc. Now this term 'Sudhanvan' occurs, as such, twice in the RV; once with reference to Rudra (5.42.11) and again with reference to Maruts or Rudras (5.57.2). In 8.3.7, when they sing praises of Indra Rudra joins with them, and there are many other passages also (8.7.12, 10.93.7 and so on), where Rudra is associated with them. These seem to be rather significant, considering how Rudra is usually avoided by the other devas.

In this respect, the Rbhus are (like the Maruts) in the camps of both Indra and Rudra. In due course, it will be shown in other papers of these studies that (1) Indra belongs essentially to the group of Solar deities, (2) Rudra is the principal deity of

the lunar group, (3) rituals and forms of worships associated with Rindra (for example the Munis), are distinctly different from the rituals of worship accorded to Indra and the other solar deities, and finally (4) an underlying tension exists between these two even in the Rg Veda itself. All this is supported by textual passages which will be quoted and discussed in subsequent studies. For the time being, all that is required is the acceptance of the fact that the Rbhush are associated with both the sun and the moon, (Indra and Rudra in this case), as is only to be expected of Powers whose function is to control time-flow.

Here, I would draw attention to verse 8.64.5 which though addressed to Agni has something interesting to say about the Rbhush.

‘तं नेमि ऋभुवः यथा आ नमस्व सहूतिभिः
नेदीयः यज्ञं अगिर ॥’

(8.64.5)

I think Griffith has unnecessarily deviated from the words of the text in his translation, and so, I shall adopt Wilson's version :

‘O Angiras, with the deities associated in the
invocation, draw this offering
near thee as the Rbhush (bend) the
circumference of a wheel.’

(Wilson—8.64.5)

Here, quite obviously the wheel is the wheel of time, which the Rbhush are shaping for the chariot which they were making for time to move in (See supra).

Once the Rbhush had created time out of the Timeless, and once Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuna and other devas had established order in nature (Study III.2), the problem that required to be tackled next, before life could spring up on earth, was to establish and measure out time. The immediate experience of time by man is the phenomenon of day and night following one another in unending succession, but with this difference that some days are hotter than others and some more pleasant, at which time the plants are more productive. It does not require much effort to realise that the sun plays an important part in these rhythmic seasonal changes.

The astronomical observations of the RV people at the earliest stages seem to have begun with the study of the sun's movements for which purpose all the equipment that was required was a simple stick, called gnomon by us, ('laguda' in Sanskrit) placed erect on the ground in an open space. The length and directions of the shadow cast by the gnomon follow the sun's movements in the sky, and if they are carefully kept track of, over a length of time, they provide sufficient data to define the year and fix the cardinal points of the sun, namely the equinoxes and solstices.

In my Study No. II.1, I have pointed out that the RV people had already accumulated information about the year and its divisions. They had combined this with some simple facts about the moon's cycle (lunations). They had reached the following conclusions. That the Sun's cycle consisted of 360 days, (perhaps their figure was about 365; but they preferred the round figure for other reasons), which they divided into 12 months of 30 days each, a month being defined as the number of days covered by the moon's lunation period. They had also realised that the moon's lunation period was somewhat less than 30 days so that at the end of the year, their own year was short of the true solar year by about 5 days, and that the latter was in excess of the moon's year (that is the period of 12 lunations) by about 11 to 12 days. These differences were adjusted by them periodically by such devices as the intercalary year, reference to which is found in verses, such as 1.25.8.

Verse 10.85.5 says clearly that the moon it is which makes the years (samānām māsah ākṛti) Read in the context 'māsah' here refers to Soma as the Moon.

Verse 1.25.8 reads as follows

‘वेद मासः धृतञ्जतः द्वादश प्रजाञ्जतः
वेद यः उपञ्जायते ॥’

(1.25.8)

Translated :

‘Truly to his holy law, he (Varuna) knows the twelve months with their progeny ;
He knows the moon of later birth.’

(1.25.8)

(‘Progeny’, here refers to seasons formed as sub-groups of the 12 months.)

In consonance with the general style and language of expression adopted by the RV people their discovery of these facts has been presented by them in the form of myths.

Macdonell (Vedic Mythology) has brought together whatever data that is available about the ‘physical aspect or equipment of the Rbhus’ which, as he says, are not very many. Amongst these, one is to be found in a verse which I shall quote, though its importance for this study will become apparent only later :

‘ऋभुं ऋभूक्षणः रयिं वाजे वाजिन्स्तमं युजं
इन्द्रस्त्वं तं हवामहे सदाऽसातमं अश्विनं ॥’

(4.37.5)

‘Rbhukshans ! him, for handy wealth, the mightiest
comrade in the fight,
Him, Indra’s equal, we invoke, most bounteous ever,
rich in steeds’.

(4.37.5)

(The translation is not good, but we may let it pass. What I want to be noted here is the reference to the Rbhu as an ‘aśvin’, translated here as ‘possessor of steed’, which results in the loss of the special significance of the word in the context, which will come for comments later.)

More important than their physical characteristics are the feats of the Rbhus. Of these, the most important was their undertaking the task of creating time out of the timeless, and their making four cups out of the one of Tvaṣṭr, as a first step towards that end. (These matters have been described in Study No. III.1).

The next thing that the Rbhus did was to ‘fashion or make a car (1.111.1, 1.61.3, 4.33.8, 4.36.2), which is horseless, reinless, three-wheeled and traverses space (4.36.1)’ (Macdonell V.M. p. 132).

(As already mentioned in my Study III.1, this car represents the flow of time in three aspects, past, present and future). ‘The car which goes round, they fashioned for the Aśvins (1.20.3, 1.161.6, 10.39.12).’

I quote verse 4.34.9, which is an interesting one in this connection :

‘ ये अश्विना ये पितरा ये ऊति धेनुं ततक्षुः ऋभुवः ये अश्वः
ये अंसता ये ऋधक् रोदसी ये विश्वः नरः सुऽपत्यानि चक्रुः ॥ ’

(4.34.9)

Both Wilson and Griffith have found themselves in difficulties in translating this verse, but the former is slightly better, and I shall have recourse to him. Their difficulty lies in themselves and not in the verse. They cannot believe what the verse says in plain terms.

‘ Rbhus, who by your assistance (gratified) the Aśvins, who (renovated your) parents, who (restored) the cow, who fabricated the horse, who made armour (for the gods), who separated earth and heaven, and who, the all-pervading leaders of rites, accomplished acts productive of good results.’
(Wilson—4.34.9).

(Wilson has put in brackets terms which are not warranted by the text. As far as Aśvins, the Cow, the Parents and the horses are concerned, for example, the text is clear ; the Rbhus fashioned them, that is, literally made them, ‘ as a carpenter makes things.’ This makes the Aśvins, the symbols of time itself. The meaning of the other feats will become clear as we proceed.

The horses they made are the two bay-horses of Indra. This, as I pointed out in my Study on Tvaṣṭṛ (Father-Time), (Study III.1) symbolises time in the present tense. (They are also in one of the important verses, namely 1.57.3, said to represent Power and Light respectively.) ‘ They (the Rbhus) further fashioned or made a cow (1.161.3; 4.34.9) which yields nectar (1.20.3) and is all-stimulating and omniform (4.33.8). This cow they formed out of hide (1.110.8), or erected (aripīta) from a hide (1.161.7, etc.). They guarded her and formed her flesh (4.33.4)’ (Macdonell, op. cit.). The ‘ hide ’ here is the sky, and the cow the Moon, as has been explained by me in my Study on the Ādityas (Study III.4). As for the sun, it is the ‘ vatsa ’, of 1.110.8, and 1.110.1, which the Aśvins re-united with the mother (time).

The Rbhus also rejuvenated their parents (1.20.4, 1.111.1, 4.35.3), who were frail and lay like decaying posts (1.110.8, 4.33.2

and 3). They made the two who were old young again (1.161.3 and 7). In the brief enumeration of their feats already referred to (4.34.9), they are simply said to have 'fashioned their parents they made their frail and very old parents very young again, so as to be able to walk (4.36.3)' (Macdonell. op. cit). When we remember that the Rbhus symbolise time, the meaning of this seemingly miraculous performance becomes easy to interpret. All that this group of myths signifies is that time is a cycle, and that objects on earth and heaven grow and diminish cyclically, that is, are born, develop, die, are re-born and so on endlessly. (Later, we will find more miracles of this type attributed to the Āśvins, who as already mentioned are, just like the Rbhus, symbols of the time-flow. This is just one characteristic of the Āśvins who have other characteristics also).

As makers of time, the Rbhus ride with both the sun and the moon, but this lands them in a difficulty. When they complete 12 cycles with the moon, that is when 12 lunar months have elapsed, the Rbhus find themselves 12 days ahead of the sun who has still this much time to go (12 days) before completing the solar year cycle, both the sun and the moon having started together on the same day in the first instance. As Macdonell has put it : 'Another myth connects the Rbhus with Savitar. They are said to have been round the sky, wind-spread, in swift course (4.33.1. cb. 1.161.12). After much wandering they came to the house of Savitr, who conferred immortality on them when they came to Aghoya (1.110.2 and 3). When slumbering for twelve (12) days, after they had rejoiced in the hospitality of Aghoya, they made fair fields and directed the streams, plants occupied the arid ground and waters the lowlands (4.33.7). By their skill they made grass on the heights and waters in the depths, when they slumbered in the house of Aghoya (1.161.11). Having slept, they asked Aghoya as to who had awakened them ; in a year they looked around (1.161.13)' (op. cit. p. 133).

The 12 days of sleep spent by the Rbhus in Aghoya, the house of Savitr (the deva of Sūrya), represent the 12 days that bridge the gap between the lunar and solar cycles in a solar year. The reference to the fair fields with running streams, flourishing plants, arid grounds with waters in the lowlands etc., are indications of

the season in which these twelve days are adjusted. It is a season with plenty of water in rivers, and with plants flourishing in nook and corner. There is, it should be observed, no reference to rain. The season must, therefore, either be middle autumn or early spring (with melting ice on the mountains feeding the rivers.). Further clue is provided by the reference to the goat and the dog. The former symbolises Pūṣan and the latter Agni. (The play is on the word Mātariśvan, the name of Agni. The second part of the word is śvan, a dog). Pūṣan, a form of Savitr or Sūrya-deva, is the lord of the winter-solstice, and Rudra (a form of Agni who possesses dogs) the lord of 'daksināyana' which ends with the Winter-solstice. We can, therefore, definitely say that the twelve days of Rbhus' sleep refer to the 12 days preceding or succeeding the Winter-solstice and that the year in the system of reckoning commenced with Winter-solstice, or 12 days thereafter. (The RV New Year has changed from time to time, and different verses assign different dates to the New Year.).

With this, the Rbhus have completed the task which was assigned to them. They had made the 3 phases of time-flow (Past, Present, and Future) out of the timeless Infinity ; they had set up the cycles of the sun and moon, in the process creating day and night. They have given the formula for correlating the periodicities of the solar and lunar cycles. Now, they are rewarded by being made devas entitled to Soma offerings, and then they go away to heaven, handing over the further tasks of managing time (the seasons, the division of the day and night into smaller units etc.) to the Aśvins, who are their creations and who, in a sense, are themselves under a new name. All this has already been brought out in Study III.1, and in the preceding paras of this study.

The story of time is continued by the Aśvins with the co-operation of other deities. This will form the subject of the next series of these studies, namely Series IV.

RG VEDIC STUDIES—III.4.

ĀSVINS—TIME-KEEPERS.

The R.V. is full of puzzles, conundrums, fiddles and brain-teasers, and quite a lot of them are packed together in the myths of the Āsvins. Macdonell has devoted over 5 pages of closely printed matter in his 'Vedic Mythology' to cover all the information available in the text to these deities. As he has pointed out, 'they are celebrated in more than 50 entire hymns, and in parts of several others, while their name occurs more than 400 times.' One cannot complain of want of material for the failure in the exegetic exercises of the Āsvin myths. To continue the extract from Macdonell's work: 'Though they (namely the Āsvins) hold a distinct position among the deities of light and their appellation is Indian, their connection with any definite phenomenon of light is so obscure that their original nature has been a puzzle to Vedic interpreters from the earliest times.' How much a puzzle this was can be seen from the one full page which Macdonell has devoted to this problem at the end of his section (Article 21) on Āsvins. He says: 'As to the physical basis of the Āsvins, the language of the Ṛsis is so vague that they themselves do not seem to have understood what phenomenon these deities represented', and then goes on to summarise the difficulties experienced by the principal commentators from olden times, including Yāska and his predecessors referred to by him. Even as a summary, they are formidable and I shall not linger to quote them.

I do not think Macdonell is right in saying that 'the Ṛsi composers themselves do not seem to have understood what phenomenon these deities represented.' The fact is the Ṛsis knew very well what they were talking about. The Āsvins do not represent any 'physical phenomenon', as that term is commonly understood in Vedic mythological exegeses. Like all other Vedic devas, they do symbolise a phenomenon of Power in the physical world, but this is not of a material nature. Therein lies the rub. Though not a very deeply abstract concept, to express such a non-material phenomenon in symbolic language does pose a serious problem.

But the R̥sis have, in my opinion, very deliberately made the interpretation of the myths more difficult by adopting very abstruse symbols. Also, the R̥sis were using these symbols to express not one single concept, but more than one. They are undoubtedly closely inter-connected concepts, but nevertheless they are sufficiently distinctly separate as to make it difficult to trace and establish their inter-connection easily. It is not that the R̥sis were blabbering something unintelligible to themselves. The fault lies in the approach to Vedic exegesis adopted by the commentators and it is a manifold fault.

R̥g Vedic commentators, especially of modern times, assume that one symbol in the text represents one concept only, in spite of their being aware that a term like 'go' (गोः), ordinarily meaning a bull, is used in many different senses, including that of its sexual opposite, namely a cow! Again, they do not give sufficient credit to the highly intellectual attainment of the R̥sis. Where this is made clear in plain language, as in the tenth mandala, they brush off the matter by deeming these to be 'later interpolations.' Indian commentators of the traditional type are either Mimamsins who see only rituals everywhere, like Śāyana, or are Vedantins, who read into the text, on very thin foundations, metaphysical speculations evolved in later ages. Others see mysticism everywhere, even where it is not present. No one is prepared to look at the texts as embodying the cultural concepts of a very great civilisation, ranging from the most material to the most philosophical and mystical.

Light is so much associated with the Aśvins, that all commentators view these deities as originators of some form of light, and engage themselves in treating them as its source. This is, of course quite natural, but once it was realised that this only leads to a morass, this path should have been abandoned. The question would then arise whether the light associated with the Aśvins could itself be a symbol of something else. After all association with light need not necessarily mean being the original source of light.

Ordinarily, in R̥g Vedic exegesis, Western scholarship has set up a tradition of tracing the etymology of the names of deities. Yāska also had a similar tendency. But in this particular case of

Ásvins, there has been no appeal to etymology either by Yaska or by the Western scholars. Macdonell's dictum that the appellation is Indian and that 'the origin of these gods is to be sought in a pre-Vedic period', meaning thereby that it is not of Indo-European provenance has practically closed this line of investigation. (The implications of Macdonell's statement, if true, are far-reaching.) Yet it is precisely in the name, Ásvin, that we see one of the closest relationship between word and myth.

Like Rbhu, the name Ásvins is not a natural but a manufactured word, that is to say, it has been formulated by intellectuals by a combination or alteration of words in ordinary use to express a new concept or thought. It is like the word 'philosophy' which is made up by a combination of the two Greek words, 'philo-' and '-sophy', meaning, 'love of knowledge', a faculty not exhibited ordinarily by men, and so not endowed with a name for itself in ordinary use.

Usually, I am wary of resorting to etymology in the Rg Vedic exegesis, but I am breaking my rule here in commencing my examination of the Ásvins myths with an etymological study of the word. I am adopting this procedure as a special case (as with Rbhus) because of the remarkable correspondence between myth and etymology in this case. (I refer to Indo-European linguistics only in the first instance. Later, in another study, I will show how Dravidian etymology can be used to supplement and fill up the gaps which the former leaves in the exegesis.)

A preliminary difficulty is to decide how a 'manufactured' word should be split up for the purpose of etymological examination. Here, however, the difficulty is, to some extent, tempered as it is generally accepted that the word is derived from *ásva*, meaning a horse. Ásvins are in the myths said to possess horses, and this has inveigled some scholars to conclude that Ásvins derive their name from that fact, since the natural, that is to say, grammatical, derivative 'asvin' means just that, namely possessing horses.

This is unfortunate for two reasons; firstly, this explanation merely leads to a dead end, taking us no further beyond it in myth-analysis; secondly because in many passages where this word

occurs, the translators and commentators take it to mean 'horseman', whereas the text is in those cases really referring to the Ásvins devas themselves.

The proper break-up should be 'ásva + vin', to mean a horse-bird, or more correctly 'winged horse.' The Sydlable 'va' is dropped in the combination. Verse 1.118.5, for example, clearly refers to the horses of the Ásvins as 'birds' and as possessing 'swift wings' (ásva-pataṅga). In 8.5.7, the horses are called falcons (ásvebhis śyenebhis). I need not give further references, since they are well-known.

This is a piece of poetical imagery intended merely to convey the information that the Ásvins travel as 'swift as thought', and as 'rapid as the tempest.' They travel as fast as the Wind (5.41.3) vātasya patman). They are in 3.58.7 asked to accompany the wind and his steeds (vāyunā niyuthbhih) These horses live on rain-water (1.181.2). The Ásvins are even called Sons of the Sea (sindhu mātārā) and 'the heaven's wide vessel is said to be theirs' (aritrām vām divah). (1.46.2 and 8).

This is to say that not only do they travel very fast, but that they are so fast as to make it appear as if they are everywhere, that is omnipresent. In verses 4.44.4, and 8.22.3, for example, they are called exactly that, 'Omnipresent' (puruḥhūh) In 5.73.1, they may be anywhere, 'in many spots, or in mid-air, far remote or near at hand.'

Actually, the Ásvins travel about in a car, and it is a curious kind of car which flies about so fast. Though stated in 1.117.2 to be drawn by swift horses, yet in 1.120.10, they are said to be 'horseless' (anaśvam). Such horses as there are are merely imaginary ones for they are yoked together by nothing but the will of the mind, (manoyujā) (8.5.2). The reins of the car are only light rays (gabhastim) (7.71.3).

The Ásvins are in fact 'bright with flames, emanating from Agni, whose acts are pure', (didi agni suci-vratā) (1.15.1). They are radiant and shining (śubhra) (7.68.1), (puru-candrena) (7.72.1), and soon. This resplendent brilliant light is not that of Ásvins, but

of Agni's. He, the Son of Dakṣinā, travels in their car (3.58.1), and he moves in their path (3.29.6). The relationship between Agni and the Aśvins is indeed even more intimate. They are in 1.112.18 termed Angirases, the principal or chief Angirasa (in fact the first) being elsewhere said to be Agni himself.

The principal time of the appearance of the Aśvins to receive sacrificial offerings is the morning. (They come at other times too, but that will be studied later). They come in the morning even before dawn (10.61.4) sometimes, but generally they follow after Uṣas in their car. They come with Agni, and are present when the fire is kindled. These three events, namely the appearance of the Aśvins, the kindling of the fire and the break of dawn are generally simultaneous (1.157.1, 7.72.4, etc.). Their car is 'fraught with oil (that is ghee, melted butter), various coloured', (Citram ghravantam) which, being the favoured refreshment of Agni, points to Agni himself. Verse 4.13.1 provides an example of the relationship that exists between Agni and Aśvins at the morning worship.

‘प्रति अग्निः उपसां अग्रं अख्यत् विष्मतीनां सुष्मनाः रत्नघ्रेयं
यातं अश्विना सुकृतः दुरोणं उक् सूर्यः ज्योतिषा देवः एति ॥’

(4.13.1)

‘Agni hath looked benevolently—minded, on the wealth-giving spring of radiant Mornings.

Come Aśvins; to the dwelling place of the pious : Sūrya
the God is rising with his splendour’

(4.13.1)

Agni comes to the dawn worship in the car of Aśvins.

The Aśvin myths have a predilection towards the numbers three and four. The number two is prominent in the constant reference to the Aśvins as pairs, and number three in the descriptions of the various parts of their car, and their movements.

The Aśvins are with very rare exception inseparable twins (3.39.3, 10.17.2, and so on.). In one of the passages, one of them is called the ‘son of heaven’, and the other, ‘a victorious prince’ (1.181.4). This is probably the only exception. Macdonell quotes another (5.73.4), but that can well be interpreted, not as

meaning separate births of the twins, but as their being found even from their first coming into being in various places (omni-present). Hymn 2.39 is wholly devoted to find objects of a dual nature (such as hands, eyes, etc.), which are used as metaphors to emphasize the inseparability of the twin Ásvins. The meaning of the symbolism underlying the pairing of the Ásvins will be explained later. In 10.17.2, the Ásvins, and Yama and Yami, are spoken of as two twins, born to Saranyu (primeval Waters, one of the first principles of creation.) and Vivasvan, a form of Agni.

We see the link between Ásvins and Agni even more strongly in Verse 1.30.19.

‘ नि अक्ष्यस्य मूर्धनि चक्रं स्थस्य येमयुः
परि द्यां अन्यत् इयते ॥ ’

(1.30.19)

‘ High on the forehead of the Bull one chariot wheel
you ever keep,
The other round the sky revolves ’

(1.30.19)

In the Rg Veda, (and in Hinduism generally), the wheel (cakra) symbol is very common and signifies many things. It can stand for the sun, or moon, or for movement generally; most often, it represents power and powerful objects, such as weapons of war. The movement, or object of motion, need not be physical or material ones. Even Time and its sub-divisions into year, day, and month can be symbolised by the wheel.

The word ‘cakra’ occurs over 50 times in the Rg Veda, and if some of its derivatives, such as ‘cakri’, are taken into account, about a dozen more are added to this number.

It is quite obvious that in the verse quoted, the wheels (of the Ásvins) do not represent either powerful instruments or physical (that is, material) objects in motion. The only other alternative is that they represent some aspect of Time and its sub-divisions, mythologically related to Agni’s powers.

Here, (in verse 1.30.19) ‘the wheel on the Bull’s forehead’ signifies that Agni (the Bull) controls the movements of the Ásvins

in the sky which they conduct with the aid of the other wheel. That the Agni's symbolic chariot is controlled by light rays emanating from Agni has already been established in this paper.

What is left to be determined now is what aspect of Time is it which the Ásvins represent.

There is a great amount of indefiniteness about the number of wheels in the Ásvins' car, and for the elucidation of the problem now before us it will help if we study the triple-characteristics of Ásvins' car, and their movements.

The favourite time for worshipping Ásvins is the morning, when they have precedence over all the other devas. (5.76.2 and 3, and 5.77.1 and 2). But as these and other verses inform us, they are entitled to the noon and evening rituals also. Besides these three visits paid during day time, they come down three times in the night also (8.5.7. and 8)

‘आ नः स्तोमं उप द्रवत् त्वयं श्येनेभिः आशुभिः ।

यातं अश्वेभिः अश्विना ॥’

(8.5.7)

‘येभिः तिस्रः पराज्वतः दिवः विश्वानि रोचना

तोन् अक्तून् परिज्दीयथः ॥’

(8.5.8)

‘Hitherward running speedily with horses, as
with rapid hawks,

Come, Ásvins, to our song of praise’

(8.5.7)

‘Wherewith the three wide distances, and all
the lights that are in heaven,

Ye traverse, and three times of night’

(8.5.8)

There is also verse 1.34.2 which confirms it: ‘thrice journey ye by night, O Ásvins, thrice by day.’ This can only mean the division of a day (of 24 hours) into six equal intervals. The 3 places, padāni, of the Ásvins which verse 8.8.23 refers to as ‘erst concealed, but now revealed with the coming of the two Sages (Agni and Dawn), in the morning’, can only mean the three nightly visits (journeys) of the Ásvins.

The symbolism of three in connection with the *Aśvins* is played upon in various ways (29 times) in Hymn 1.34 alone, and is repeated frequently in many other passages also. As far as the car's equipment is concerned, there are said to be : (1) Three felines, (2) Three-wheels, and (3) Three seats. (The car is, in verse 12, said to be triple. This is said in mere exuberance of poetical spirit, and does not mean that they have three cars.).

The three seats are easily explained as being intended for the *Aśvins*, and *Agni* (or *Sūrya* who occasionally takes the place of *Agni* in a few verses). But the triple wheels and the addition to the number three in general require more detailed discussion.

There are two verses (8.22.4 and 1.30.19) where only 2 wheels are mentioned contrary to the usual number of 3, mentioned in all other related verses. An explanation for verse 1.30.19 has already been provided, and it remains valid for 8.22.4, where one wheel is said to move swiftly round with the *Aśvins* (*irmā iyate*), and the other impels them forward (*ā la Wilson*) (*vām iṣanyati*).

There are a few verses whose detailed examination I have found to be very fruitful.

To start with, we may take verse 15 and 16 from hymn 10.85.

‘ यत् अयातं शुभः पती वरेज्यं सूर्या उप
क्व एकं चक्रं वां आसीत् क्व देष्ट्राय तस्थयुः ॥ ’

(10.85.15)

‘ O ye Two Lords of lustre, then when ye to *Sūrya*'s
Wedding came,
Where was one chariot wheel of yours ? where stood
ye for the Sire's command ? ’

(10.85.15)

The ‘ one wheel ’ referred to here is the one controlled by *Agni*, and the question posed here is ; ‘ What did you do with that wheel at *Sūrya*'s wedding, when *Agni* himself (as *Sūrya*) was present there, and you were just standing by, instead of moving about in accordance with *Agni*'s eternal command to you ? ’

Verse 10.85.16 is even more interesting and introduces a new aspect altogether to the theme.

‘ द्वे ते चक्रे सूर्यं ब्रह्माणः ऋतुष्या विदुः
अथ एकं चक्रं यत् गुहा तत् अद्वातयः इत् विदुः ॥ ’

(10.85.16)

‘ The Brāhmans by their seasons, know,
O Sūrya, these two wheels of thine :
One kept concealed, those only who are skilled in
highest truths have learned ’

(10.85.16)

Here, not only has the symbolism of the wheels changed from the previous verse, but the wheels are now said to belong to Sūrya, and not Aśvins. The reason for the latter will become clear when the first has been discussed.

The term ‘*ṛtu-thā*’ of the first line, which Griffith translates as ‘by their seasons’, is better translated as ‘in season’, that is, ‘as they occur’. What the Rṣi wishes to convey is that all the Brahmins know all events, past and present, but only the most skilled (*addhātayah*) (sages in text) know (or can foresee) the future, which is concealed from others. The ‘Wheels’ here refer to time, past, present and future, and have been transferred in this verse from the Aśvins to Sūrya. (These ‘sages’ are here to be supposed to have read the ‘horoscope’ of Sūrya before the marriage, being astrologers, or by intuition. If astrology did exist amongst the R.V. people, it must have been of the stellar, rather than the planetary, type. Or perhaps what is meant here is just omen-reading.) As for Sūrya’s wheels being referred to rather than Aśvins that is because it is Sūrya’s life that is being discussed, but the principle is the same. Just like Sūrya’s, the three Wheels of the Aśvins also refer to the three phases of time, the Past, the Present and the Future.

This question of one wheel being put to different uses from the others and appearing to be different comes up in 5.73.3. There, however, the unique wheel seems to refer to the Present, and the other two which take the ‘neighbouring dark spaces’ (*nahūṣā yugā rajāṁsi*) quite obviously refer to the Past and the Future, both of which are in the dark, that is, are not seen, one

because it has gone, and the other because it has still to come. It will be noticed that this verse adopts the term 'yuga' for time, just as verses 10.72.1, 2 and 3 denote in a different connection three phases of time through qualifications of the same term, namely 'yugā', by 'uttara' for the future, 'pūrvia', for the most distant past, and 'prathama' for the later (immediately nearer), though there is a blurring in the tense indication of 'prathama' and 'pūrvia'. (The point, which I wish to make is, however, unaffected thereby). For the R.V. people, the three phases of Time, the Past, the Present and the Future are three wheels yoked together, as in the car of the Ásvins which is horseless, which travels with the speed of light, having light beams as reins, and which is Omnipresent. (The word 'yuga' is derived from 'yuj', meaning 'to yoke together', 'to join together', etc.).

In the preceding Study, namely III.3, I have already explained how the mantle of the Rbhus (the makers of time) had fallen on the Ásvins for working out further details, vide my notes on 4.37.5, where the Rbhus are referred to as 'Ásvins', and on 4.34.9, which clearly says that the Ásvins were made (as a carpenter makes things) by the Rbhus.

The Ásvins then represent the powers which divide Time into the Past, Present, and Future. That is why their car has so many triple characteristics. The Power which enables them to do this is Agni, so much so that they are sometimes spoken of as if they are themselves Agni. I would quote two verses, namely 1.164.9 and 1.164.27 which point to the identification of Ásvins with Agni much more directly than many others.

Hymn 1.164 is an extremely important one, and like many others in the R.V., it is full of conundrums, and puzzles, which in fact hold the clue to the myths and stories in the other sections. Only when they are understood and interpreted can we be certain that our exegeses are acceptable, satisfactory and realistic. Such an exercise not only taxes our intelligence to the utmost, but it requires also very elaborate discussions to establish the validity of the solutions when reached. It cannot be made a part of a paper of limited objectives such as the present one. I hope one day to present my unravelling of these puzzles which have been constructed with so much ingenuity. Special studies on this subject will be presented (D.V.) in due course.

Verse 1.164.9 reads as follows :

‘ युक्ता माता आसीत् घुरि दक्षिणायाः अतिष्ठत् गर्भः वृजनीषु अंतः
अनीमेत् वत्सः अनु गां अपश्यत् विश्वरूप्यं त्रिषु योजनेषु ॥ ’

(1.164.9)

‘ Yoked was the Mother to the boon Cow’s car-pole : in
the dark rows of cloud the Infant rested.
Then the Calf lowed and looked upon the Mother, the
Cow who wears all shapes in all directions ’

(1.164.9)

Griffith’s translation, like that of most scholars, may be perfectly correct grammatically, but it requires more than linguistics to understand language and culture. The explanatory notes provided by Griffith—or for that matter Sāyana—also do not meet the requirement.

The Mother which is the Cow here is the Waters, and the Infant and Calf are Agni, as will be clear from the discussions in II.4 of my R.V. Studies. Griffith has translated ‘dakṣiṇāyā’ of the original text as ‘the boon Cow’! It makes no sense to talk of ‘boon Cow’s car pole’ even if it is justified by the lexicon. Wilson, and Sāyana, are slightly better in considering ‘dakṣiṇa’ here to be the earth, and to the extent that it leads to the conclusion that the ‘Cow’ was impregnated it certainly meets the situation. I personally think that the word ‘dakṣiṇa’ refers to the southern fire, here as elsewhere in the R.V. In any case, this will be more in accord here when considered along with the preceding verse, namely 1.164.8. However, I shall not press the point for the time being, and shall go along with Sāyana (and Wilson) to accept that the verse is referring to the Cow conceiving and bringing forth an Infant. That the Cow here means the Waters is clear from the statement that the Infant was resting (athīstat) on ‘vrjaniṣu’, which Griffith has translated as ‘dark cloud’. From the lexicon, it would appear that ‘vrjani’ is derived from the root ‘vr̥j’ to mean ‘wander about’, which appropriately describes the Waters. Moreover, the intriguing statement that ‘the Cow wears all shapes in three directions’ fits the Waters well since they have no shape, and shape themselves into whatever object they flow into.

I shall now take up Verse 1.164.27 :

‘ दिङ्मृग्वती वसुष्मती वसूनां वत्सं इच्छन्ती मनसा अभि आगात्
दुहुं अश्विभ्यां पयः अच्या इयं सा वर्धतां महते सौभगाय ॥’

(1.164.27)

‘ She, lady of all treasure, is come hither yearning
in spirit for her calf and lowing.

May this Cow yield her milk for both the Ásvins
and may she prosper to our high advantage’

(1.164.27)

The Ásvins are the calf of the Waters here, which is the role usually, as in 1.164.9, assigned to Agni.

I would now draw attention to hymn 1.144 addressed to Agni. The first two verses of this hymn serve to identify him. The two Mighty Ones referred to in verse 6 as ‘bright, golden, closely joined, rolling round who have come upto thy holy grass’ can fit no other pair, certainly not Heaven and Earth, as aptly as the Ásvins. Further verse 4 talks (in line 1) of ‘the two, a pair of equal power, dwelling in the same place, and engaged in the same ceremony’ (Wilson). Surely, this cannot refer to Heaven and Earth. The two Ásvins are in 7.73.4 two priests (and in 10.52.2, they are told by Agni, the Hota, that their function at the daily ritual is that of Adhvaryus (‘Ásvins, each day yours is the Adhvaryus’ duty.) In 10.40.4 they are called Hotrā. Verse 5 of Hymn 1.144 talks of ‘ten fingers animating him and ‘he speeds over the sloping surface of the land’. The phrase ‘animating ten fingers’ can only mean ‘impelled by the forces of the Universe’. (I have already in my studies III.3 and 4 established that the term ‘ten fingers’ refers to the limits of the Universe. As for ‘speeding over the land’, the reference is not to Agni but the Ásvins as being impelled to go thus. Lastly, we have verse 3 of the same hymn (1.144.).

‘ युयुषतः संज्वयसा तत् इत् वपुः समानं अर्थं विज्जरित्रता मिथः

आत् ई भगः न हव्यः सं अस्मत् आ वोळहुः न रश्मीन् स

अयस्त सारथि ॥’

(1.144.3)

* Seeking in course altern to reach the self-same end,
 the two co-partners strive to win this beauteous form
 Like Bhaga must he be duly invoked by us,
 as he who drives the car holds fast the horse's rein'

(1.144.3)

The 'two co-partners', are, as already explained, the Aśvins who have the form of, that is to say, 'derive their splendid appearance from', Agni, who holds the reins of the Aśvins' Car, a matter which has already been gone into by me earlier.

What still remains to be explained is the statement that they (the Aśvins) 'seek in course altern to reach the self-same end'.

The path on which the Aśvins travel is declared to be 'golden-coloured' (hiranya-vartani) on the one hand, and 'red' (Rudra-vartani) on the other. The former word which occurs 7 times (1.92.18, 8.5.11, etc.) in the R.V. is applied solely to the Aśvins, with one exception (6.61.7) when it is Sarasvatī whose path is thus referred to. As for the latter word, namely 'rudravartani', in all the five passages (1.3.3, 8.22.1, etc.), it is applied solely to the Aśvins. Their path in all these cases is said to be red, (in one passage 1.3.3, red with flame), and in verse 8.22.14, they are further referred to as Rudras, which is a term applied to them in many other passages also.

This calls for an explanation. Quite clearly, the 'golden-coloured' is the path where sun shines brightly, and consequently the 'rudra-vartani' would be the period when the sun is dimmed somewhat. That is to say, we have here references to the Uttarāyana, and the Dakṣiṇāyana respectively. Rudra it must be remembered, stands for the red colour, and his power is greatest when the sun is in the southern direction.

Another explanation, (not different from, but in concordance with the first), is also there. Hiranyavartani is the time of the day when the sun shines, and rudravartani, the time of the night, which, as 'rajas', is said to be the red one.

Still another explanation perhaps lies in the phases of the moon, the bright and dark halves (pakṣah, or pakṣia, as 3.53.16 has it) of the Moon. The 'golden path' would then be the days of the

waxing moon, culminating in the Full Moon, and 'rudravartani' the days of the waning moon, culminating in the New Moon, when the night would truly be 'rajas'.

A metaphysical explanation can even be, with some plausibility, found in the 'rudravartani' being the dead past (in time) and the golden path being the present and the future to come. Perhaps pessimists would prefer to look at it in the opposite way, just as all civilisations talk of a golden past in comparison with the present.

It may be pointed out that in 1.182.5 and other passages, the Ásvins are said to have made 'ships with wings' to save the son of Tugra from the water-floods. (If here the term 'Water-floods' is understood to mean the apāh, the Mother Waters which flood antarikṣa, the 'ships with wings' may well mean the Moon and its two pakṣas or phases. Tugra, it may be noted, is derived in the lexicons from 'tuj' meaning 'to waste away', which is what happens periodically to the moon in its waning phase. And while I am on the subject I might as well refer to verse 1.116.4 where Bhujyu, the son of Tugra, is said to have been carried by the Ásvins for three days and three nights before being brought to the sea's further shore. Quite obviously, this means the appearance of the Moon on the third day after New Moon. If confirmation is required of this, one might turn to the lexicon which shows 'bhujyu' as being derived from the root 'bhuj' meaning 'to bend', which accords with the fact that the moon appears on the third day after New Moon as a bent horn-like object, (the horned moon). (There are frequent references in the R.V. to the Ásvins' ships and their travelling about on the sea). All this can, therefore, quite justifiably be taken to refer to the Moon.

The reason for the Ásvins being represented always as a pair may now be appreciated, since they have one foot each, so to say, in two opposite camps, the bright and the dark aspects of time, the sun and the moon, the moon in its two phases, the night and the day, the hiranya-vartani and the rudra-vartani, with Rudra and Maruts on the one hand, and with Savitar and Indra on the other, and with Agni in both his red and golden forms.

The Ásvins represent Time in its three phases of Past, Present and Future, but their role in the matter is not limited to mere

representation. They help also to keep time for the people, not merely in the seasonal divisions of the year (which will be gone into in a later study), but even in measuring the hours of the day.

They appear on earth six times a day which itself means that the R.V. people sub-divided the day (of 24 hours according to us) into six sub-units (of 4 hours each, by our calculation). More than that, they helped to fix the unit of time. Verse 1.164.11 tells us that. Before coming to that verse, let me dispose off verses 1.164.12, 13, and 48 which, though dealing with something altogether different from 1.164.11, bear, on the face of it, phraseology which makes them appear as if they are discussing the same thing. (The subject, namely time, in all these cases is the same, namely, days year, etc., but the aspects are different.)

Verse 1.164.48 has already been discussed in an earlier study, where it was pointed out that, (as accepted by all scholars), it refers to the year and its sub-divisions (a single wheel, cakram, with 3 naves, (nabhyāni,) 12 felines (pradhayah,;) and 30 spokes, (śankavah,). I am repeating these details here as they will have to be compared with the details to be found in 1.164.11 later on.

Verse 1.164.12 is an interesting one, and I shall quote it, as it has a bearing here when read with verse 1.123.8 and other verses. (e.g., 6.59.6, which, however, is somewhat vague).

‘ पंचष्पादं पितरं द्वादशआकृतिं दिव आहुः परे अर्धेपुरीषिणं
अथ इमे अन्ये उपरे विज्वक्ष्णं सप्तचक्रे षट्समरे आहुः अपितं ॥ ’

(1.164.12)

‘ They call him in the farther half of heaven, the Sire
five footed, of twelve forms, wealthy in watery-store.
These others say that he, God, with far-seeing eyes, is
mounted on the lower seven-wheeled, six-spoked car.’

(1.164.12)

What the Rṣi is saying is that the same thing is viewed differently in heaven by the devas and on earth by men. The devas consider the Sire, Agni (who is specifically referred to by name in the preceding verse), as the maker of the day, which has 12 divisions (which we may call Yojanas). Each Yojana thus equals 2 hours of our

time. This is further sub-divided into 5 units, (which we may call, 'muhūrthas'). Each 'muhūrtha' would then equal 24 minutes of our time. (The names of these divisions and sub-divisions are not readily ascertainable in the RV, and I am, therefore, assigning them these names.). Here we have the beginnings of the later belief that the day for Brahma in duration is equal to one year on earth.

Such a division of the day (into 60 units) is mentioned in Verse 1.128.3, where the day and night (mentioned in the preceding verse, namely 1.128.7) are said to each 'traverse 30 regions' (tripsatam yojanāni ekā eka kratum bari panti sadhya).

(The second part of the verse (1.164.12), however, views the sun (a manifestation of Agni) as providing (12 months) made up of groups of seven days. In my study on the Ādityas in the First Series, I have already pointed out how the RV people counted the number of days in a month of 30 days as $7 + 8 + 7 + 8$, and the normal 'week' for them was 7 days, with the eighth, Mārtāṇḍa appearing and disappearing every alternate week. It is also relevant to the present paper that Agni should be credited in the RV with seven tongues, bringing him on par with the Sun's seven rays or seven horses).

On this basis of the day 'having 12 forms of the 5-footed Sire' (1st line of 1.164.12 above), we have this equivalence formula :

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 24 \text{ hours} & = & 1 \text{ Day} & = & 12 \text{ Yojanas} \\
 & & 2 \text{ hours} & = & 1 \text{ Yojana} = 5 \text{ Muhūrthas} \\
 & & 24 \text{ minutes} & = & 1 \text{ Muhūrtha} \\
 \text{Therefore, 1 Day} & & & = & 60 \text{ Muhūrthas}
 \end{array}$$

(These terms are *NOT* to be identified or equated with the same terms as used in later post-Vedic times.)

Verse 1.164.12 is, therefore, talking of the day (of 24 hours), linking it with the subject of verse 1.164.11 also.

We come now to verse 1.164.11, which reads :

‘ द्वादशऽग्रं नहि तत् जराय वर्वति चक्रं परि खां ऋतस्य
आ पुत्राः अग्ने मिथुनासः अत्र सप्त शतानि विंशतिः च तस्युः ॥ ’

(1.164.11)

'Formed with 12 spokes, by length of time unweakened,
rolls round the heaven this wheel of during Order.
Herein established, joined in pairs together,
seven hundred Sons, and twenty, stand, O Agni'

(1.164.11)

(It will be noticed that here, we have one wheel, 12 spokes and 720 Sons in pairs, against 3 naves, 12 wheels and 720 spokes of verse 1.164.48. The two verses, therefore, symbolically express two different concepts ; the latter refers to the year, and the former, to the day as already mentioned).

What the Rsi says in this verse is that a day (our 24 hours) is divided into 12 units (or 12 Yojanas as referred to earlier in this Study.), and that each unit is made up of 720 pairs of Sons of Agni (or 1440 in all). Each unit (which we may call a Nimisha) would then correspond to 5 seconds of our time ($24 \times 60 \times 60$ seconds divided by 12×1440). (A Muhūrtha of our nomenclature would thus equal 288 Nimishas). The sons of Agni referred to in the context of the verse can only be the Aśvins who always appear in pairs. The Aśvins are, therefore, looked upon as measures of the units contained in a day, and are in that sense 'mātrā' of Time.

The word 'mātrā' which does occur in the R.V. in the sense of 'measuring', or 'measurement' is not found to apply to time. Actually, the words applying to time in its various aspects in the R.V., are (1) Yuga meaning time generally as future, and distant past (which we may treat as our present); (2) Kālah used once only in 10.42.9 to refer to time in a general sense, as proper time; (3) Yojana which, though generally meaning distance in space, can also in certain passages be understood as applying to time (for example, to timing in music, 1.88.5); (4) muhūrtha meaning a moment or a short period of time; and (5) nimishah meaning a much shorter period of time, such as is required for the winking of an eye (the word is derived from the root miṣ, meaning just that, namely 'winking of eyes').

It is quite clear from various R.V. passages, as I shall presently show, that there were in use in R.V. times the necessary paraphernalia for measuring time. A quantitative gradation of sub-units leading ultimately to the day as a whole, apparently existed,

and also there were equipments for keeping time. I am, however, unable to ascertain how the various words mentioned in the preceding para were used, with two exceptions. It is quite clear that the smallest unit was the 'nimiṣa', and that time in the general sense of past, present and future was indicated by the word 'yuga'. My problem is in regard to the other three, namely, kāla, yojana, and muhūrtha, and I am unable to determine which words were used for the intervals between the day and the nimiṣa. Hence, I have been forced to assign names on an adhoc basis.

It is also clear that some unit of time was further subdivided into 100 and 1000 sub-units. These numbers, namely, 100 and 1000, occur repeatedly in many passages in which the Aśvins appear by name, and in such a way that rules out the possibility that the figures are used in a loose sense, to indicate many in general. For example, we have passages 1.118.8 and 24, 1.119.2, 1.117.7, 1.180.8, 10.73.3 & 4, and so on. I shall take up verse. 117.17, which may be read along with 1.116.16, which mentions the same story, but in clearer terms, to illustrate how this conclusion is reached.

‘शतं मेषान् वृक्ये ममहानं तमः प्रञ्जीतं अश्विनेन पित्रा
आ अक्षी ऋज्जस्रश्वे अश्विनौ अधत्तं ज्योतिः अंघ्राय चक्रधुः विजक्षे ॥’
(1.117.17)

‘He whom for furnishing a hundred wethers to the she-wolf,
his wicked father blinded—

To him, Rjraśva, gave ye eyes, O Aśvins ; light to the
blind ye sent for perfect vision’.

(1.117.17)

(Each one of the words in this verse is used in a double sense.)

My immediate purpose will be served by pointing out the symbolism underlying the word ‘hundred wethers’. I do not know why Griffith translates ‘meṣān’ as wethers, instead of the more direct ‘rams’ (or sheep of Wilson). But, it will be noticed that in the context even the meaning ‘rams’ provides no sensible or intelligible translation. The fact is that the word meṣān, has nothing to do with rams or wethers here. It is, in this context, derived from the root, miṣ, ‘to wink’ and means a

moment of time. (The connection with the eye is further confirmed by the fact, that Rjraśva was blinded, that is, was made to lose his eye-sight by his father). The word 'vrkāya', does not mean a she-wolf, but a deity of some kind or other, (namely Time, the Great Devourer; as I shall show later), who was favoured by the son to which the father seems to have objected, being himself a devotee of some other deity. We have here a religious sectarian dispute. The verse provides clues to determine to some extent who the deities could be. Quite obviously, the son Rjraśva was a devotee of the Aśvins, since they have come to his help. As for Rjraśva, a look into the etymology of the word proves very helpful. The word is obviously made up of the two vocables, namely 'rjā' and 'asva', and in a number of passages such as 7.18.23, and 6.63.9, they combine to mean 'red-horse'. It could well mean, therefore, that he was given the name because he was a devotee of the Aśvins in the form of Time, (vrkā), the Great Devourer, as against his father, who saw them in the positive form of Time.

The word 'vrkye' is the dative form of vrkyā, which in turn means in the context, a devotee of vrka. This is a word which occurs in about 29 passages in at least two of which (1.117.21 and 8.22.6), it bears the meaning of a plough. In 1.117.21, it is directly connected with the Aśvins who are said to be 'ploughing and sowing barley'. Now another word for plough is 'sira' which in 10.101.3 and 4 is said 'to be yoked' etc. Here is a play on the word 'yogā', which, as pointed out earlier, bears the meaning of time, and the yoking of plough reminds us of the Aśvins who are 'yoked' together. These passages clearly establish that in this context, vrkyā, signifies devotion to the Aśvins. (Vrka, as a wolf or devourer, could well represent Time, the Great Devourer of all things).

The myth is now demythologised. Rjraśva, a devotee of the Aśvins and engaged in the pursuit of studies relating to time, had apparently decided that some unit of time should consist of 100 nīṣas (meṣas) only which apparently upset his father. (We will leave open the question whether he was actually blinded or not. This probably was an innovation. Actually, this still seems to be a myth and not a historical fact.) Complete demythologising leaves us to conclude that all that the R̥ṣi wants us to understand is that some unit of time in the day, perhaps the day itself, was

attempted to be divided into 100 sub-units in the alternate system. If this is done, we get a unit which is equal to 864 seconds. ($24 \times 60 \times 60$, divided by 100). It will be noticed that this number 864 plays a very important part in later calculations of Yuga, in Jain and Hindu Calendars. (864,000, and its multiples and sub-multiples). (Some passages indicate a further sub-division ten-fold making the total into a 1000 units). Thus verse 1.119.1 talks of the Aśvins possessing 1000 banners besides 100 treasures. But, this is too much of a detail which, for the time being, may be ignored, lest the understanding of this very complex subject becomes even more difficult. ($864=8 \times 108$)

Vāḷakhilya hymn 7 which is addressed to a 'Dasyavevṛka' could well be an extension of this same myth, the name meaning one who has grappled with (or merely made alterations in measuring) time, the great devourer. Here, we have again a reference to the figure hundred as in the case of Rjāśva. The total of the numbers referred to in the Vāḷakhilya hymn amounts to 1800, that is to say, 18×100 . It appears probable that what the ṛṣi is suggesting here is a sub-division of the (what I have termed Muhūrtha) into 4 sub-units each of which is to be considered as made up of 72 Nimiṣa (4×18).

Thus,

1 Muhūrtha = 4 sub-units, (which we will call Kāla)

1 Kāla = 72 Nimiṣas ($= 8 \times 9 = 2^3 \times 3^2$)

(Equal to 6 Minutes)

(Therefore, 1 Muhūrtha = 288 Nimiṣas).

(In the above analysis, I had interpreted the 720 pairs of verse 1.164.11, as made up of 2 units each. If, however, a pair is itself taken as a unit, we will arrive at the Nimiṣa as equal to 10 seconds).

The number 72 is a multiple of 3 and 2, being doubled and tripled respectively, ($2^3 \times 3^2$). For the R.V. people who had an almost aesthetic feeling for figures, threes and twos had great sanctity. In the context of these two numbers appearing in such close association with the Aśvins, such a combination as this would have been even more valuable for them. It is in fact quite probable that this combination was the basis for the myths concerning the

Ásvins repeating these two numbers with an intensity bordering on obsession.

Did the R.V. people have any equipment for measuring time on this system?

To me it appears they did. The first requirement for setting up such an equipment is to find some material which could maintain a steady and uniform flow, and early clepsidras had recourse to water for this purpose. The R.V. people certainly were intelligent and advanced enough to know this and take advantage of the knowledge.

I think some hint as to the form of the equipment used for this purpose is provided in 10.106.3 (1st line) which I quote :

‘साकंयुजा शकुनस्यऽव पक्षा पश्वाऽव चित्रा यजुः आ गमिष्टं ॥’

(1st line of 10.106.3)

‘Like the two pinions of a bird, connected like two choicc animals, you have sought our worship’.

(1st line of 10-106.3)

Perhaps the device was in the form of two-widged animals with water flowing between them in regulated speed. That was quite likely the appearance of the R.V. ‘clock’. It is quite possible that more deep studies of the other verses of this and other hymns will reveal further details. For example, I suspect that verses such as 8.8.23, which talk of three steps (padāni) or which, as already discussed in this paper, divide the day into 60 units, or those such as 8.10.5, (also discussed) which talk of the Ásvins coming three times in the day and three times in the night, have something to do with this. We have also 2.39.3, which talk of the Ásvins coming like two ‘cakra-vāk’ birds in the morning. As is well-known, this is a mythological bird, the male and female of which are said to be separated in the night by remaining on the opposite shores of rivers, and in the agony of separation calling out to each other throughout the night. It is possible that the purpose of verses 2.39.3 and 8.8.23 is to say that the night-watch calls out the time at three equal intervals. Verse 5.74.2 which is addressed to the Ásvins, refers to people who are their callers.

The myth of the restoration of youth to Chyāvana by the Aśvins, the divine physicians, which appears in 7.68.6 and various other hymns, places beyond doubt the role of Aśvins as guardians of time. It will be remembered that a similar myth is related of the Rbhus, who, as I have pointed out in the preceding paper of this series, are makers of the three divisions of time, in verses 1.20.4, 4.35.5. etc., where they are said to have restored their aged parents to youth. Age and loss of youth are the result of passage of time, and restoration of youth is equivalent to reversing the ravages of time. Whoever can restore youth is in fact over-powering or controlling time. Therein lies the mystery of the ability of Aśvins and Rbhus to restore youth to the aged.

This study has been concerned with only one set of Aśvins myths, namely their connection with time. It has also been able to provide an explanation for two cases of 'saviour' myths of the Aśvins. As for other aspects, such as the Aśvins' bags over-flowing with honey (madhu), the help rendered to Atri in his distress and so on, I shall discuss them in a Study in the Fourth Series.

With this I close the present study. The next paper (III.5), the last in this Series, will discuss the role played by Agni in the creation and operation of the time element.

RG-VEDIC STUDIES III.5.

THE POWER OF AGNI—TIME.

Having brought light to the world, and having helped Indra to create Space and to release the Supreme Energy, namely the Waters, the Mother, from the hold of the deep darkness of Tamas, Agni was next assigned by the Divine Principle, Jyoti, to create Time, and organise order and system in the Universe as a preliminary to the coming of life on the earth.

Time as an eternally changing flux was not there in the beginning. It was embedded in the womb of Eternity which was placed in the custody of Tvaṣṭṛ, the Father, when he and Aditi emerged from the all-pervading Jyoti. The devas then created the Ṛbhus, beings who lacked Immortality, but to whom it was promised as a gift if they could fashion the time-flux out of the bag (or cup) of Infinity which was with Tvaṣṭṛ.

It was Agni, the Son of the Waters and of the Universe, who brought this message to the Ṛbhus from the devas, and also helped them to achieve the task set to them. In fact, Agni himself was the supplier of energy to the three Ṛbhus, namely Ṛbhuksan (or Indra), Vibhvan (or Varuṇa) and Vāja (or all the other gods put together), who were all nothing but Agni himself in different forms.

The Ṛbhus then set about their task by chiselling a pair of bay horses for Indra, which were a source of Power and Light to him, and which later served as present time. They then fashioned a Cow, the Mother to take care of Infinite Time, and carved a unique chariot for the Aśvins.

All these activities caused some anxiety to Tvaṣṭṛ who found his hold on Time slipping away from him, and so he retired from the field to confine his activities to the function of creation of life. He was, however, given a honourable place in the scheme of Time as worked out by the Ṛbhus by assigning to him the New Year's Day as his own.

As for the Ṛbhus, they were made Immortal in recognition of their services. They then went away to heaven leaving the

further steps to be taken in organising time to the Ásvins. They had, before going, formulated the scheme of the Year, the month and the days, and also provided a formula, whereby the gap of 11 or 12 days, that exist between the lunar and solar cycles in a period of one year, could be reconciled.

Meanwhile, Agni had been active in setting up order in the world, and for this purpose he had formulated three concepts or basic principles of law, namely Dharma, Rta and Vrata. Dharma applied to the Universe as a whole, acting like a 'cakra' or wheel of fundamental rhythm, and reconciliation, between the opposites of Dualism which was the inescapable form that the Ultimate One had to take for the purpose of creation.

The domain of Dharma is the entire Universe, whereas that of Rta is the various sub-spheres, making up the Universe as a whole. Vrata, on the other hand applied to the person of the devas, and of human beings. This power it drew from Dharma, but the Rg Vedic people were not yet clear about the connection. On the other hand, Rta was more or less a mechanical operation of non-personal elements. Agni assigned, or rather distributed, various spheres of action to various devas, and delegated them, as it were, enough powers to discharge their responsibilities. Thus each deva had his own rta, Varuṇa for example, overseeing men's action, Savitar ensuring the sun's rising and course etc. Similarly, each deva had his own 'vrata', by observing which men, and others could get the particular benefits which was in the power of that deva to bestow. For example, Agni could himself, amongst other things, bestow wealth, the Waters could endow the gift of progeny and so on.

Before introducing these Principles, the Universe had to be shaped, and structured, and its limits set. Also the vacuum of space had to be filled with the energy that is necessary to animate life and set in motion the non-personal forces and objects. All this Agni did with the aid of Viṣṇu and Indra in the first instance, as already indicated.

The time element now created as a flux by the Ṛbhus and the Ásvins took over matters from this stage on. To the Ásvins had fallen the task of working out the details of time within the parameter of year, months, and days, set by the Ṛbhus.

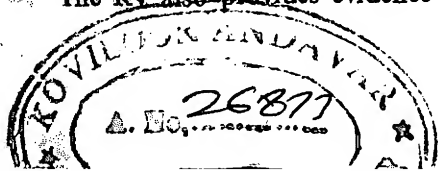
The Ásvins operating in pairs looked in three directions, the Past, the Present and the Future, and all the accoutrements of their car were shaped to that end.

They drew their powers from Agni who was their progenitor, as well as their controller, being the charioteer of their car. They divided the day into various sub-divisions. The definition of the day and the fixing of the duration of the period of time covered by it was the first major task. For all ritual purposes, the appearance of the Sun, heralded by the Dawn (Uṣas) constituted the beginning, and the duration of the day was deemed to last from one Dawn to the next. But since this duration varied according to the seasons, another yard-stick had to be adopted. The meridian point of the sun, easily fixed by means of a gnomon (Skt. 'laguda'), a simple device, being nothing more than a specially fashioned piece of stick, was taken as the guiding point. The day then lasted from one meridian point of the sun to the next.

The day was divided into 60 sub-divisions (termed *Yojanas* in this paper) (30 in day-time and an equal number in the night), but the *Ásvin*s themselves whose car always travelled all over space with the speed of light, riding over the rays of *Agni*, came down to earth, as a regular measure, only 6 times a day (thrice during day-light and thrice in the night) as representatives of *Agni*, and along with him as priests (*Adhvaryus* to his *Hotṛ*) at the Dawn worship. Thus the *Ásvin*s divided the day into 12 divisions termed *Yojanas* and each of these was made up of 5 *Muhūrtas*. The next lower unit is the *Kāla*, of which there are 4 in a *Muhūrta*, and each *Kāla* contains 72 *Nimiṣas*. (The *RV* is clear enough about the formulae, but the names to be assigned to each stage are not so clear.)

The names given here are those adopted by me ad hoc—as far as the concerned stage goes. The 72 units of Nimiṣas may be read as a multiple of 3s and 2s, with three of the latter and two of the former. ($72 = 3^2 \times 2^3$). This formula had a great appeal to the RV Ṛṣis who set much store by these two numbers, especially in connection with the Aśvins. They even provided a mechanical device somewhat resembling their appearance to serve as a clepsydra for the RV people. (Compare $108 = 2^2 \times 3^3$)

~~The RV also provides evidence of disputes having arisen over~~



the formula of division of time in a day. As against the formulae shown above there appears to have been a school which would have preferred to adopt a system of 100s and 1000s of sub-units, and to this school, the destructive, or devourer, aspect of time, *vṛka*, seemed to be more important.

The *Ásvins* as controllers of time, and in their capacity as divine physicians, were able to restore his youth to old *Chyavana*. They restored the eye-sight of *Rjráśva* who was in support of the '*vṛka*' system. The dispute led to the father blinding the son who was, however, saved by the *Ásvins*, who were in agreement with him. When in the flux of time, the moon (said to be *Bhujyu*, the son of *Tugra* in the myth) lost its lustre completely in the Waters of the *antarikṣa* on New Moon day, the *Ásvins* came to *Bhujyu*'s help. They carried him over the Waters in a ship for three days and three nights. At the end of that period, he gained the shore and appeared in heaven as the horned moon on the third day after the New Moon. On account of their readiness to render such help of a miraculous nature, the *Ásvins* earned for themselves the soubriquet of Wonder-workers (*dasrah*).

The *Ásvins* achieved such miracles because of their ability to control time. And the power to do this, they derived from their father, *Agni*, the charioteer of their car, either in his own form, or that of *Savitar*.

The preceding four Studies, namely III.1 to III.4, provide all the evidence from the *Rg Veda*, some of which have been quoted or referred to for these remarks. As for the very many miracles credited to the *Ásvins*, I have demythologised three of them. I have not here referred to one of the most important characteristics associated with the *Ásvins*, namely association with *madhu* or honey. I shall discuss this and some other myths, such as for example, the aid rendered by them to *Atri*, in a paper in the next series. In that paper, I shall show how these aspects are related to the *Ásvins*' power over time in another capacity, namely the Seasons, exercised under the aegis of *Agni* in that case also.